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# 1097 "All the News That Fits"



# **Wyclef's Life-or-Death Trip Home**

HE DAY AFTER A 7.0-MAGNITUDE EARTHQUAKE DEVastated the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince, Wyclef Jean was there, directing the relief efforts of his organization Yéle Haiti. Jean, who spent his childhood in nearby Croix-des-Bouquets, flew into the Dominican Republic the morning after the quake and made his way to the demolished city. "We spent the day picking up dead bodies," he told a news crew. "This is the apocalypse." Less than 48 hours after the quake, Yéle Haiti - which solicited funds through social-networking sites - raised more than \$1 million. Jean's fellow Fugee Pras, who also has Haitian roots. was in New York when the earthquake struck. "A friend called and said the capital was destroyed," he says. Pras spent days trying to locate family in Haiti and soliciting support. To make a donation to the efforts, go to yele.org or doctorswithoutborders.org.

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His father tried to turn him into a suicide bomber and groomed him to lead Al Qaeda. Osama's son on growing up bin Laden. By Guy Lawson..... 52

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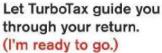
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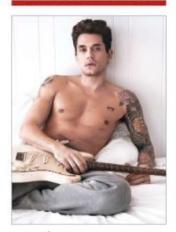
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#### On the Cover

John Mayer photographed in L.A. on January 6th, 2010.

#### Photograph by Mark Seliger

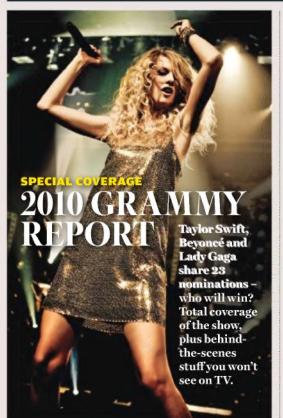
Styling by Annie Psaltiras for the Wall Group. Grooming by David Cox for Redken at Celestine Agency. Set design by Andy Henbest for Frank Reps. Sweatpants by James Perse.

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# John Mayer Uncensored

R-RATED CRUISES, RAW COMEDY, SHADY TWEETS: "ROLLING STONE" rounds up Mayer's 20 most outrageous moments, from the sordid origins of his song "Bare Ballin'," to his highly scientific study of which of his tunes make fans cry the most, to the debut of his *Borat* mankini. Also, bonus photos and video from Mayer's cover shoot with Mark Seliger. *rollingstone.com/issue1097* 



#### THE RS POLL

Should Kiss be in the Rock Hall of Fame?

57% Said Yes

Vote now: "Is it time to forgive Kanye West for interrupting Taylor Swift's VMA acceptance speech last year?"

#### THE TRAVERS TAKE

"I loved shooting all those people!"



—Willem Dafoe talking with ROLLING STONE'S Peter Travers about the film *To Live* and Die in L.A.

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# Correspondence { Love Letters & Advice }≡



#### The Decade's Best

WELL PLAYED, "ROLLING Stone." As I sifted through the pages of your "Best of the '00s" issue [RS 1094/1095], I couldn't help but feel nostalgic. This is a timeless edition to keep forever.

Josh Streets, Chicago

THE LIST WAS IMPRESSIVE. I completely agree with Kid A being voted Best Album of the Decade - it changed everything. But RS is not just about the artists; it's about the readers, and there should have been a Readers Poll in the magazine not just online.

> Robert Mills San Juan Capistrano, CA

I ALWAYS LOVE TO READ your end-of-the-decade list. RS helps me fill the holes from the stuff I missed along the way. However, as much as I like the music, I wonder if any of it is truly classic, like the great records from the Sixties and Seventies. Today, most bands would rather have a big single than a complex album.

Kel Gratke, Maplewood, MN

SO BOB DYLAN WINS THREE Grammys, a Golden Globe and an Oscar, places two albums in your decade's Top 50, is awarded a Pulitzer Prize, becomes a DJ, plays 100 live dates a year and still doesn't make your Artist of the Decade list? What's a guy have to do to get recognized? Put out a Christmas album and donate the royalties to charity?

> Stephen Goldberg Long Beach, NY

"KID A"? IT'S THE EMPEROR'S new clothes. Sorry, someone had to say it.

Ted Pasarow, Studio City, CA

I FIND IT HARD TO ACCEPT that the Red Hot Chili Peppers were left off both the Top Albums and Top Songs lists. By the Way and Stadium Arcadium are both incredible records.

Max Berger, Toronto

AS SOMEONE WHO GREW UP in this decade, I was immensely helped by RS in finding the great artists of my generation. My love of Springsteen and U2 was passed down from my father, but you helped me discover the White Stripes, Bright Eyes and so many others.

> Connor Cheeseman Waterloo, Ontario

MUSIC HAS ALWAYS SERVED as a history lesson, allowing us a glimpse into the concerns of generations before us. It's not hard to see in songs like "A Change is Gonna Come" or "The Times They Are A-Changin'" what the Sixties were about. But this generation has given us hits like "99 Problems" and "Rehab" - in the years ahead, we'll look back and realize how superficial we really were.

Ian Langeheine, Selbyville, DE

I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY the only thing worth mentioning about Madonna was her kiss with Britney. She released four CDs, celebrated one of her biggest singles and had the most successful solo tour of all time.

Hayden Wright, Boston

YOUR LISTS HAD ZERO COUNtry-music albums. A list without Toby Keith, Taylor Swift or Faith Hill is incomplete.

Tim Schultz, Castalia, OH

#### Making 'Avatar'

"THE IMPOSSIBLE REALITY of James Cameron" [RS 1094/ 1095], by Erik Hedegaard, was amazing. Cameron is singlehandedly carrying Hollywood into the 21st century. Between Avatar, "various far-flung business ventures" and getting revenge on high school bullies, Cameron is the most interesting man in the world!

Bill Mueller, Baltimore

"Sifting through your Decade's Best issue, I couldn't help but feel nostalgic. This is an edition to keep forever.

IN YOUR REVIEW OF THE '00s, I was disappointed by the lack of coverage of the music that has its roots in 9/11. While you mentioned The Rising, you ignored all of the other music inspired by the attacks.

> Andrew Bogda Lake in the Hills, IL

I CAN'T BELIEVE HOW YOU can trash Guns n' Roses' Chinese Democracy when you gave it four stars just over a year ago.

Donald Soffer, St. Louis

#### No End in Sight

NO DISRESPECT TO GEORGE Clooney, but Ben Wallace-Wells' article on the perils of international intervention ["Darfuristan," RS 1094/1095] was 10 times more eye-opening than a celebrity-stuffed PSA.

Melissa Preston, via the Internet

#### Folk-Music Hero

THANKS FOR YOUR WELLresearched obituary of my halfsister, Mary Travers [RS 1089]. She couldn't have asked for a more respectful memorial.

John Travers, Hollywood

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What They're Saying The buzz about "Darfuristan" [RS 1094/1095]

OUR STORY ON THE QUAGmire in Darfur sparked a vigorous debate online among human-rights advocates. Most praised writer Ben Wallace-Wells for capturing Darfur's "complicated dynamics," but some faulted him on key points.

Sean Brooks of Save Darfur lamented the "gross neglect of important shifts in Sudanese politics." Rob Crilly, a Daily Mail correspon-



dent, disagreed that Darfur is the left's Iraq, calling the similarities between Obama and Bush "more striking than the differences." And Rebecca Hamilton, a fellow at the Open Society Institute, questioned if food matters more to refugees

than dignity: "The Darfuris I have spoken with, like most people on the planet, don't want to have to choose. They want both."



#### The Profiler

RITING CELEBRITY PROFILES is a peculiar way to make a living. You go meet these strangers, with the idea of unlocking their psyche, when all they really want to do is plug their latest book, movie, album or TV show. You don't get a lot of time with them, not just because they lead ridiculously busy lives but also because their handlers know that the more time you spend with them, the more likely it is that you'll maybe get a

deeper glimpse into that psyche than they'd like to give you.

Contributing editor Erik Hedegaard, who wrote this issue's almost uncomfortably intimate portrait of John Mayer, has spent most of his adult life on the celebrity beat, and in that time he's developed some foolproof techniques. Sometimes they work beautifully and get him into places few reporters see: Jack Nicholson's bedroom, for instance, or getting high

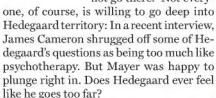
in Rodney Dangerfield's L.A. apartment. Other times, they backfire miserably: Keith Richards so strenuously objected to Hedegaard's questions that he threatened to shove a banana up his ass. "And the thing is, he meant it," Hedegaard says. "He took an instant chemical dislike to me. I was fucked.'

The trick, Hedegaard says, is to control the process from the get-go: "You have to establish a false sense of intimacy right away. It's like a seduction. I'm trying to give the subject an excuse to drop their guard - everybody wants to reveal the truth about themselves. But, in return, they have to feel like they won't be betrayed."

Hedegaard has a few patented ways in. "I once read something about what's the quickest way to get to know another person," he says. "The answer's pretty obvious: Have sex with them. So the question for me

> is, how do I do that in this manufactured setting? The answer is to go right to the heart of the matter and start talking about things you don't usually talk about with strangers. Or maybe it's that it's easier to talk about some of these things with people you don't know.

> "I'm genuinely interested in what makes people tick," Hedegaard adds. "All the gut-level stuff that churns a person - childhood issues, sexual issues. I just can't not go there." Not every-



"Whether I ultimately betray them, I have no idea," he says. "That's the horrible part."

-WILL DANA, Managing Editor



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Erik Hedegaard

#### THIS ISSUE'S CONTRIBUTORS



#### Josh Eells

This issue marks the Brooklyn writer's first feature for RS, "The Semi-Charmed Life of Vampire Weekend." Eells says growing up in Austin, "the live-

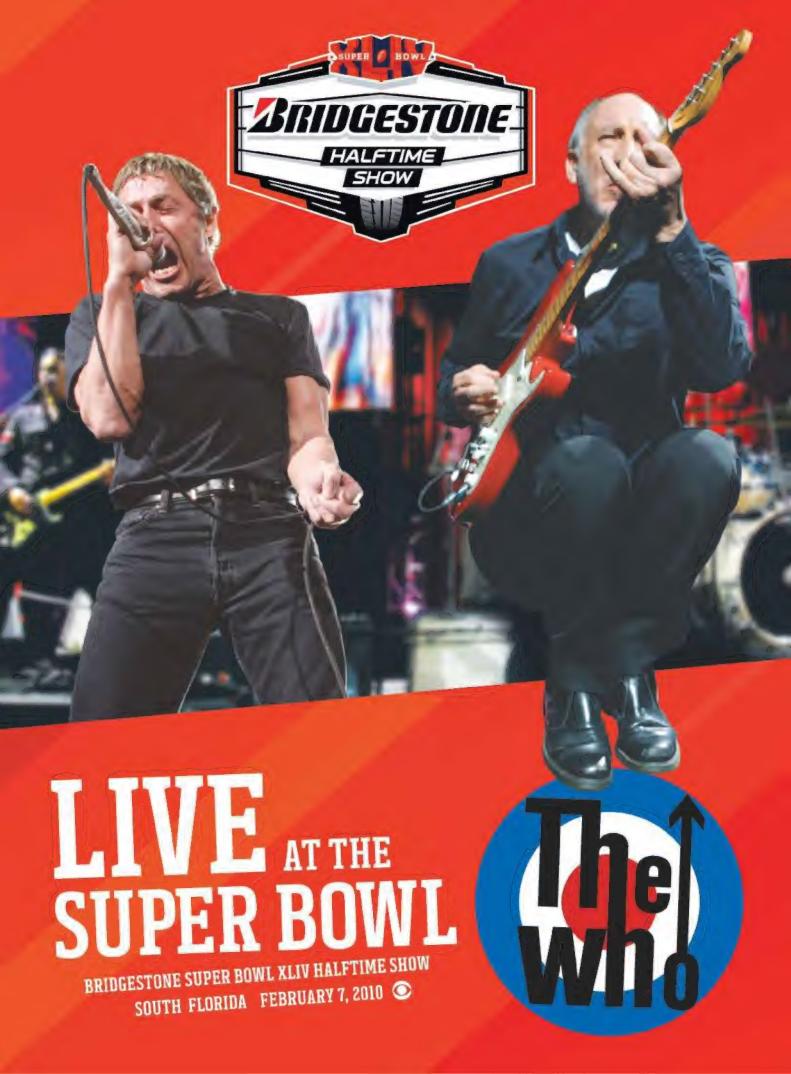
music capital of the world," helped jumpstart his career. As an undergrad at the University of Texas, he covered SXSW for the local paper. "All the students would leave for spring break, but I'd stick around. I wrote about 10 shows a night on deadline - that was one of the things that made me like being a journalist."



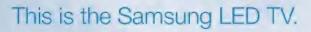
#### Dan Monick

L.A. photographer Monick, who shot Ke\$ha this issue, is a former drummer for Minneapolis indie band Lifter Puller, a Nineties precursor to

the Hold Steady. "It was the last band I was in," says Monick. "But it's best to leave the party when it's at its peak." He also claims he's "the only person who moved to L.A. as an adult and wishes they had grown up in the San Fernando Valley. It's the most underrated hotbed of weirdness I have ever seen."



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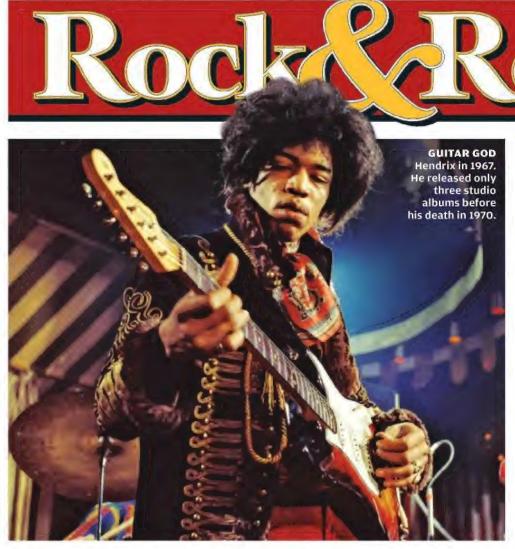
The Beatle digs up Liverpool memories, duets with Macca on new LP. Page 25

#### Q&A: TAYLOR SWIFT

On rap nicknames and tricking out her pad with an indoor pond. Page 26

#### SPOON'S NEW GROOVE

Weed, microchips and copy-editing: the rise of Austin's indie heroes. Page 29



# Hendrix Vaults Reveal Unheard Treasures

New disc of unearthed studio cuts kicks off massive reissue project By Andy Greene

he died in 1970, Jimi Hendrix booked time at New York's Record Plant to finish "Valleys of Neptune," a track he'd been slowly picking away at for two years. "He just kept refining it and refining it," says John McDermott, head archivist at Experience Hendrix, which oversees Jimi's catalog. "There's something about the song that speaks

to the promise of what could have been."

Now that never-released tune is the title track of a 12-song collection of unheard Hendrix recordings. The material on the disc-including a smoking cover of "Sunshine of Your Love" and the blues original "Hear My Train A Comin'" - is mostly from early 1969. "This gives you a window into this important period where the original Experience took things as far as they were going to go creatively in the studio," says McDermott. "With all of these, you hear the beginning of that growing sophistication he'd show on his final recordings."

The disc is the first product in Experience Hendrix's new partnership with Sony Legacy, which has extensive plans for Hendrix's massive vaults of unreleased recordings. "This is the beginning of a whole new phase of releases," says Jimi's stepsister Janie Hendrix, who runs his estate. "In the past decade, we've discovered so much unheard audio and video that we'll be able to put out two discs a year for at least the next decade." When Hendrix died, he had [Cont. on 16]

#### The Year in Sales, From Pop to Rock

By the numbers: Kings of Leon and Beatles score as rock struggles By David Browne

F ANY BAND HAD A reason to celebrate this New Year's Eve, it was the Kings of Leon. In a slow build that recalled the rise of acts like Bruce Springsteen and R.E.M., the Kings finally connected

#### INDUSTRY

with the masses with their fourth album, Only by the Night, which sold 1.4 million copies – and was the only rock album to crack the year's list of top 10 bestsellers. "It's an uphill battle for rock bands," says co-manager Andy Mendelsohn. "It just comes down to how relentless you can be with touring. You've just gotta be out there and be seen."

But for rock acts overall, the news wasn't as good, with the Kings - who also scored a monster pop-radio hit with "Use Somebody' - becoming the only band fans got behind in a big way in 2009. Sales of rock records were down 11.1 percent, according to Nielsen SoundScan, and even superstar acts struggled to move records. Albums by U2 (No Line on the Horizon, which sold just over 1 million, [Cont. on 18]

[Cont. from 15] released only three studio albums, though endless hours of raw material sat in studio vaults, private collections and basements around the world. More than 100 discs have hit the market since ranging from stunning live performances and unreleased songs to dodgy, low-fidelity compilations of well-known tracks. This new series aims to introduce rare, unheard recordings while digitally remastering the entire catalog.

Sony acquired the catalog after a bidding war with other labels. As sales of new music continue to plummet, tunes from classic artists like Hendrix have become an increasingly important profit-driver for labels - as demonstrated by the massive sales for Michael Jackson and the Beatles in 2009. "Working with these artists who transcend any period of time is fundamental to the future of the music business," says Adam Block, general manager of Sony Legacy. "As long as there are kids learning how to play the guitar, Jimi Hendrix is going to be one of those artists they must discover."

Plans for the archives include a career-spanning box set similar to The Beatles Anthology, numerous other outtakes collections as well as DVDs of newly discovered concert footage. "The holy grail for a lot of Hendrix fans is video from the Miami Pop Festival from 1968," McDermott says. "We reeled it in a few years ago and have been restoring it ever since."

#### Deep Cuts, Rare Gems

Rolling Stones, Bruce Springsteen and David Bowie prep lavish box sets for this year



SHINE A LIGHT Richards and Jagger in 1972, the year the Stones released the double LP Exile on Main St.

#### The Rolling Stones

Exile on Main St.

It's the "whole coffee-table bit." Keith Richards says: A box-set reissue of the Stones' masterpiece, with alternate takes and totally unheard songs, personally selected by Richards and Mick Jagger. Says Richards, "Mick and I were looking at each other going, 'Did we do that?""

David Bowie Station to Station The remastered album, plus a two-disc live show from March 1976 at Long Island's Nassau

Coliseum.

#### Bruce Springsteen Darkness on the

Edge of Town

Following 2005's reissue of Born to Run - which included the remastered album, a making-of documentary and a DVD of a vintage live show - Springsteen plans to give

similar treatment to

that album's 1978 follow-up.

#### **Neil Young Archives**

Young is working on the second volume of his massive multimedia Archives series - this one will cover approximately 1973 to 1980.

**Elvis Costello** The Costello Show Costello is releasing a series of vintage live concerts: just out, a 1978 Attractions gig at Hollywood High School.

Springsteen

The reason there is so much unreleased Hendrix material is simple: Few other recording artists in the 1960s logged as many studio hours as he did. While even top acts like Bob Dylan and the Rolling Stones had to pay by the hour in costly union studios, Hendrix built his own, Electric Lady in Greenwich Village. "If he wanted to record for three straight days, he could," says McDermott. "He lived in a two-bedroom apartment in the Village and put all his money into the studio." Eddie Kramer, Hendrix's original engineer, is overseeing the remastering process of all the material. "I'm using the best of analog and of digital to get a sound quality I wasn't able to get even seven years ago," Kramer says. "When I hear my voice and Jimi's voice on these tapes, it gives me a chill."

And Experience Hendrix and Sony continue to unearth material. "After Jimi died, Warner Bros. was offered a video recording of a 1970 Dallas concert that for whatever reason wasn't acquired," says McDermott. "If anyone has it, please let me know."

The next batch of releases is already being assembled, though Sony and the estate aren't prepared to announce anything other than the box set. "Fortunately, Jimi left us with an enormous amount, and I'm confident we'll be able to share insightful experiences with Jimi Hendrix fans for many years to come," says Sony's Block. Kramer concurs. "We've got a library full of stuff, mate," he says. "It all sounds amazing."

#### **CHECKING IN**

#### Ozzy Osbourne

The Prince of Darkness looks back on his rock & roll life in new memoir

In his hilarious new memoir, I Am Ozzy, the Prince of Darkness reveals the full extent of his deprayed life in rock & roll - and why the 2000s were the worst decade of his life despite the success of his reality show.

#### Writing the book, were there things you couldn't remember?

I can remember the early Seventies, but I can't remember what I did two days ago. People always ask me if I snorted a line of ants. I can't remember whether I did or not, but it's quite possible.

#### I loved reading about your encounter with Betty Ford.

Sharon said, "I've found this place called the Betty Ford Center where they teach you to drink like a gentleman." I'm thinking, "Well, that's it, that's always been my problem - I've been doing it wrong," When I got there, I asked Betty Ford where the bar was, and her fucking face went white.

#### Will Black Sabbath tour again? I don't know. I had girlfriends

when I was younger, and I would always go, "Oh, I would like to go back with Shirley." As soon as I did, I was like, "What the fuck was



I thinking?" It's the same with Sabbath.

#### Do you miss the TV cameras?

The reality thing was an experiment that went fucking crazier than anyone expected it to. It dawned on me how much it must have fucked my kids up. Tack ended up in rehab, Kelly ended up in rehab, I ended up in rehab.

#### Are you amazed you're still

Oh, absolutely! Years ago, a doctor told me I was going to be dead before the end of the year. Keith Richards has a few more lives on me, though. I don't understand why his body hasn't just fucking stopped yet. ANDY GREENE

# Teddy Pendergrass, Soul Great

Singer's career spanned Philly soul, Eighties hits, triumph over accident By Ashley Kahn

the R&B singer whose voice – raw with emotion, heavily gospel-influenced, rich in testosterone – helped define the sound of soul in the Seventies and early Eighties, died on January 13th in his native Philadelphia after a yearlong battle

#### TRIBUTES

with cancer. He was 59.

The singer notched 37 R&B hits over his 41-year career with songs of social uplift ("Wake Up Everybody," with Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes); tunes brimming with heartache ("Love T.K.O."); and lovemaking ballads that defined the genre ("Close the Door," "Turn Off the Lights").

"I was struck by Teddy's immediately identifiable, gravelly voice," says former Columbia Records chief Clive Davis, who first heard Pendergrass with the Blue Notes in 1972. "When I first saw Teddy, he was riveting, inspiring the ladies to just give it up." A string of R&B hits, produced and written by the team of Leon Huff and Kenny Gamble for their Philadelphia International label,



LADIES NIGHT Female fans would toss lingerie and teddy bears at Pendergrass' feet. "It was pandemonium!" says Leon Huff.

soon followed: "If You Don't Know Me by Now," "The Love I Lost," "Bad Luck."

Pendergrass went solo in 1976. "Teddy was the first black artist to have an all-female concert," says Huff – fans would throw underwear and teddy bears at his feet. "It was pandemonium!" (Pendergrass had a special term for the love songs Huff and Gamble would write for him: "panty-wetters.")

A car crash in 1982 left Pendergrass paralyzed from the waist down. He returned to the studio two years later, and

in an emotional moment in 1985, he was welcomed back to the stage at the Live Aid concert. In the end, Pendergrass spent more years on the charts singing from a wheel-chair than before the accident: 13 Top 40 R&B songs, including two Number Ones and the duet "Hold Me" that launched Whitney Houston's career.

"He was also the most powerful singer I ever worked with," says Huff. "No one can forget those songs he sang. Teddy's voice is going to be like the wind - it's gonna always blow."

#### Jay Reatard 1980-2010



Punk rocker Jay Reatard was found dead at his home in Memphis on January 13th. He was 29. As of press time, the official cause of death was unknown. The singer - who released 22 albums in his career - mixed

raw sonics and tight Buzzcocks-like hooks. Reatard opened for the Pixies, Dinosaur Jr. and Spoon, and he earned fans including Win Butler and Beck, who asked Reatard to cover his own tune "Gamma Ray" for a B side in 2008. Born Jimmy Lee Lindsey Jr., Reatard began recording Stooges-style garage punk in his early teens. "Jay came from the same Southern poverty that Elvis came from," says Scott Bomar, a Memphis producer who worked with Jay. "The guitar was his escape." Reatard was notorious for unpredictable gigs - in 2008, he punched a fan who jumped onstage in Toronto, and last year in Austin, he swung his microphone stand at two fans who attacked him. "Jay was a juggernaut of ideas," says Matador Records' Chris Lombardi, who signed Reatard in 2007. "He was a genius - a nihilistic genius, but a genius nonetheless." DAVID PEISNER

#### Bobby Charles 1938-2010



Louisiana singer and songwriter Bobby Charles, who wrote "Walking to New Orleans" for Fats Domino, died of unknown causes at his Louisiana home on January 14th. He was 71. "He's got one of the most melodious voices ever transferred to a piece of vinyl." Bob

Dylan wrote in the liner notes to Charles' 2008 album. Raised in Cajun country, Charles was signed to Chess Records in 1955. When he got off the plane, label head Phil Chess was shocked to discover he had just signed their first white artist. That year, he scored an R&B hit with "See You Later, Alligator," which Bill Haley rerecorded and turned into a smash single. A few years later, his friend Fats Domino told him to come visit New Orleans. "I said probably the only way I could get there would be to walk," Charles told Rolling Stone in 2008. "As soon as I said that, I told my buddy, 'Get me a pen and pencil right away." In 1972, he teamed up with the members of the Band to cut Bobby Charles a cult classic that merges his swamp rock with the Band's American-roots sound. (He also played with them at the Last Waltz concert four years later.) In 2008, he re-emerged with Homemade Songs, featuring his close friend Dr. John. ANDY GREENE

#### IN THE NEWS

#### Artists Respond to Haitian Tragedy

A wide range of musicians including Wyclef Jean, Coldplay, Wilco, Arcade Fire and Kanye West responded quickly to the massive earthquake that shook Haiti, urging fans to donate money for the humanitarian crisis. "Artists jumped on social-media networks to get the word out," says Bob Ferguson, the music artist relations coordinator for Oxfam America, which raised \$3 million within 48 hours. Wyclef, who was born in Haiti, flew to the island the day after the earthquake and led relief efforts on behalf of his nonprofit organization, Yéle Haiti. "Wyclef should be president," says former Fugee Pras. Organized benefits quickly took shape: Julian and Kymani Marley played a fundraising show in Miami on January 15th; George Clooney signed on to help MTV pull together talent - including Sting and Bono - for a telethon scheduled to take place on January 22nd in New York and Los Angeles. "Right now what's needed there is money," says former Gnarls Barkley manager Jeff Antebi, who made two trips to Haiti as a photographer last year. "Artists should just push their fans to donate to Oxfam or Doctors Without Borders."

#### INBRIEF

- Almost 13 years after they split, Soundgarden are reuniting. Tour dates haven't been announced, but the band is reportedly weighing offers from several U.S. and international festivals. "This is a good time for Soundgarden to go on the road," says Adam Friedman, CEO of Nederlander Concerts. "Nineties bands like No Doubt and Blink-182 have done good numbers."
- The Dixie Chicks' Emily Robison and Martie Maguire have recorded an album as Court Yard Hounds, without frontwoman Natalie Maines. "We had the itch," Maguire says. "But Natalie said she wanted a break." The duo will release the LP in May and tour soon after.
- On February 16th in Brooklyn, the Plastic Ono Band will play a one-off show featuring original members Yoko Ono, Eric Clapton and Klaus Voormann, plus guests Paul Simon, Bette Midler and Sean Lennon.

In 2008, albums by AC/DC, Metallica, Coldplay and Kid Rock were all among the

year's top 10. Last year, the top seven bestselling albums were all pop, from Taylor Swift and Susan Boyle to Lady Gaga, the *Hannah Montana: The Movie* soundtrack and Black Eyed Peas. Two of those al-

bums - Swift's Fearless and Boyle's I Dreamed a Dream sold more than 3 million copies each. (The biggest seller of

2008, Lil Wayne's Tha Carter III, moved just 2.8 million.) "The Coldplays and Metallicas usually put out an album every 18 to 24 months, but people want to stay engaged with the artists now," says Scott Borchetta, head of Swift's label, Big Machine. "That's why

Lady Gaga came out with an additional package [The Fame Monster]." Eager to keep up her own engagement with her rabid fans, Swift has already recorded 13 songs for her next album, due in October.

In a year in which old-school divas Mariah Carey and Whitney Houston stumbled, no artist embodied the new era of pop like Lady Gaga, who sold 15 million digital tracks in 2009 - making her the bestselling digital act of the year. "The more creative the artist, the bigger the scope of what we can do," says Jimmy Iovine, head of Gaga's label, Interscope. "She's one of those rare people, like a David Bowie or Freddie Mercury, where the idea in the music and the marketing all comes in one thing."

With the death of Michael Jackson – and the Beatles reissuing their albums – backcatalog sales were a relative bright spot. Jackson sold a total of 8.3 million units – almost twice as many as the Number Two artist, Swift. The Beatles' remastered catalog moved 3.2 million units total, with Abbey Road leading the pack



#### Big in '09

Rock-record sales were down 11.1 percent last year, but Kings of Leon (1) sold 1.4 million copies and scored a radio hit. (2) Emo-synth act Owl City sold 2.7 million downloads of its debut single, "Fireflies." (3) Lady Gaga was the year's bestselling digital act.

with 411,000 copies sold - huge numbers for reissues. "We're never surprised by the power of the Beatles," says EMI vice president Bill Gagnon. "But those kinds of numbers you might get over time, not four months." Sales of "deep catalog" - albums more than three years old - were up 21 percent in the digital format. And ves, Pink Floyd's Dark Side of the Moon continued to sell, moving another 226,000 copies in 2009 - more than most new rock releases.

Butthe Kings weren't entirely alone: Owl City, a.k.a. Minnesota emo-synth whiz kid Adam Young, broke through by building a massive fan base on sites like MySpace before a major label came calling. It took employees at Universal's Republic label weeks to track down Young, and even when they did. it took him months to decide to sign. Universal then marketed his album Ocean Eyes first to his online fans, then to physical retailers. The warm, fuzzy single "Fireflies" wound up selling 2.7 million downloads, making it the ninth-best-selling digital track of the year. "As an industry, we're finally getting better at recognizing that all the former rules of the game are being redefined," says Republic cohead Avery Lipman.

For Young, the year's crowning moment was when Swift showed up at Owl City's New York show last summer and asked to meet him backstage. "She said, 'I'll be right back,' and then she went and dolled herself up first," says Lipman. "I told Adam, and he nearly fainted."

# HOT LIST



#### "On to the Next One" video

This art-damaged clip is both the most and least gangsta video of all time - its jeweled skull and Joker-type dude look like refugees from a perfume ad Lady Gaga rejected as too pretentious.

#### COLD WAR KIDS

#### "Audience"

Former blog-buzz bros depart indie-land, getting all Hall and Oates on this retro-groovy single. Bonus: It's Ben Folds-y enough to help you score with that sorority chick from poli-sci.

#### MUSE

#### "Resistance" video

Their triumph-rock aesthetic makes Leni Riefenstahl seem like Noah Baumbach. But the grandiose clip for Muse's Queen-on-creatine single will get even snobby skeptics banging their heads until their glasses fall off.

#### HAPPY BIRTHDAY

#### "Girls FM"

If this Muppet-y janglepop blast were any more crazy happy, we'd have to tie it down. It's the best thing from Vermont since Ben and Jerry's Peanut-Butter-Maple-Bacon-Cheddar Surprise.

#### CORINNE BAILEY RAE

#### "I'd Do It All Again"

Now that Norah Jones has gone all aggro (sorta), Rae is the new queen of brunch soul. This slowburner will make you feel like a natural woman - especially if you're a dude.



# Every Drink is an Exceptional Experience IN AN ABSOLUT WORLD

a Vision from

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# we believe in wyclef jean

Musician. Singer-songwriter. Social activist. Record producer. Actor. Student. Anything he imagines, he makes real. Learn how Wyclef Jean turns his dreams into reality...

HEN DID YOU START PERFORMING?
I've been performing since I was 4 years old. When I was 10 or 11 my mom bought me a guitar because I was getting into a lot of trouble. The guitar is the soundtrack to my life. I always knew that it was my path to perform.

#### WHEN WAS YOUR BIG BREAK?

A lot of people passed on the Fugees, but Sony Music took a chance on us and we took off. It was an exciting time because it was all about the music. I remember the Sony building was very energetic; every floor was playing different music and the artists were wandering the halls. That energy is why I'm still there. It feels like home.

#### WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN NOT PERFORMING OR RECORDING?

A lot of time passes on the tour bus and, I don't care what anybody says, you need a PlayStation®. In my music video for "Fast Car", I got a chance to be inside of the game. I'm always trying to find a way to apply the technology of the game into the music and now I'm working with Sony and PlayStation® to put my music into their games. The cool thing about gaming is that you're not limited to any form of music and can work with so many different genres – rock, hip hop, country, reggae.

#### HOW'S THIS NEW ALBUM DIFFERENT? My new album, Wyclef Jean, gives

My new album, Wyclef Jean, gives you the best of both worlds - tracks

1-6 are intimate and give the world a chance to understand the man. By Track 7 the party starts and it doesn't stop until the end.

#### WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT SEEING WYCLEF LIVE?

They call me the guy with the best show in the universe right now. I believe in captivating the audience and a lot of that comes from the intimacy of less instruments. My latest performance as part of the Live Sets brought to you by Sony make.believe is a perfect example. This is the simple Wyclef — a very acoustic setting, a few guitars, light percussion, great background singers and we just focus on the songs. That's how I love to put on a concert.

Wyclef's new self-titled album hits stores this spring.

www.wyclef.com

# Grammy Showdown: 2010

Did Lady Gaga make the album of the year? Are MGMT too weird for Grammy voters? Our A-list panel of artists - and a Las Vegas oddsmaker - give you the lowdown on the big night



Lambert Singer



Pink Singer



**Brian Aubert** Singer, Silversun Pickups



Keri Hilson Singer



Mars Singer, Phoenix



T-Pain Producer



Patrick Stump Singer, Fall Out Boy



Drummer.

#### **ALBUM OF** THE YEAR

- Beyoncé IAm . . . Sasha Fierce
- Black Eyed Peas The E.N.D.
- Lady Gaga The Fame
- Dave Matthews Band Big Whiskey and the GrooGrux King
- Taylor Swift Fearless

#### RECORD OF THE YEAR

- Beyoncé "Halo"
- Black Eyed Peas "I Gotta Feeling"
- Kings of Leon "Use Somebody"
- Lady Gaga "Poker Face"
- Taylor Swift "You Belong With Me"

#### **BEST NEW** ARTIST

- Zac Brown Band
- Silversun **Pickups**
- Keri Hilson
- MGMT
- The Ting **Tings**



#### **BEST ROCK ALBUM**

- AC/DC Black Ice
- Eric Clapton and Steve Winwood Live From Madison Square Garden
- 21st Century Breakdown
- Dave Matthews Band Big Whiskey and the GrooGrux King
- U2 No Line on the Horizon

#### THE EXPERTS SAY:

T-PAIN I love Taylor Swift's writing. Some of the stuff she talks about is really girlie, but it's cool with me.

KERI HILSON The Peas created a masterpiece. It's not just a collection of songs - it's a cohesive piece of work.



**ADAM LAMBERT** Lady Gaga makes fun, catchy dance music but with esoteric lyrics. And she injects so much performance into every song - she's just brilliant.

**VEGAS ODDS FAVOR:** 

Taylor Swift 6-to-5

WHO SHOULD WIN:

LADV GAGA 2009's break-

out - and not

just because she

Her tunes are as

glam as her style.

doesn't wear pants.

#### THE EXPERTS SAY:



ADAM LAMBERT "Halo" is gorgeous, and Beyonce's voice sounds exquisite. When I heard her runs on that song, I was like, "Oh, shit!"

**BRIAN AUBERT Billions** of people are trying to write anthems, but Kings of Leon did. "Use Somebody" is golden. Just try not to sing along.

PINK "Poker Face" has the Rihanna "Umbrella" effect: It stays in your head, sometimes annoyingly.

#### THE EXPERTS SAY:

PINK I listen to MGMT's album all the time - when I'm working out, driving or home cooking. They're fucking amazing.

T-PAIN Keri Hilson is the female Ne-Yo. She has a great voice, and her writing is meaningful - she's not just trying to make hits.

THOMAS MARS MGMT are so fresh: They came along and changed the sound of music. A lot of bands are going to follow their trend.



#### THE EXPERTS SAY:

BRIAN AUBERT AC/DC would be a great upset. I want stuff blowing up behind them as they make their acceptance speech.



PATRICK STUMP Rock music feels like it's wheezing its death rattle, but Green Day deserve a Grammy.

THOMAS MARS Asking if AC/DC made the best rock album is like asking if Picasso is the best Cubist painter.

#### **VEGAS ODDS FAVOR:**

Dave Matthews Band 9-to-5

#### WHO SHOULD WIN:

U2 It wasn't a huge hit, but U2's 13th album fused studio experimentalism with great pop songwriting.

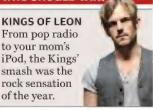


#### **VEGAS ODDS FAVOR:**

Taylor Swift 7-to-5

#### WHO SHOULD WIN:

From pop radio to your mom's iPod, the Kings' smash was the rock sensation of the year.



#### **VEGAS ODDS FAVOR:**

Keri Hilson 7-to-5

#### WHO SHOULD WIN:

MGMT The New York duo let their freak flag fly with trippy synths and attitudinal lyrics.

#### ODDS PROVIDED BY JOHNNY AVELLO AT WYNN LAS VEGAS



## The time geometry got useful.

Who says math isn't handy? Introducing NEW Tostitos<sup>a</sup> Dipping Strips. Every chip is longer, stronger and perfectly angled to reach every last corner and curve, so you can heartily dip like no Tostitos<sup>a</sup> Tortilla Chip (or finger) has ever dipped before. That Pythagoras guy was definitely onto something.



# MARTIN ROE/RETNA; GARY WOLSTENHOLME/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES; JAY BLAKESBERG/RETNA HEBERT/ICON SMI/RETNA; SHAREIF ZIYADAT/FILMMAGIC:

#### **GRAMMY SHOWDOWN: 2010**

#### BEST ALTERNATIVE ALBUM

- David Byrne and Brian Eno Everything That Happens Will Happen Today
- Death Cab for Cutie The Open Door
- Depeche Mode Sounds of the Universe
- Phoenix
  Wolfgang Amadeus Phoenix
- Yeah Yeah Yeahs It's Blitz!

#### BEST RAP SONG

- Drake "Best I Ever Had"
- Kid Cudi "Day 'N' Nite"
- T.I. and Justin Timberlake "Dead and Gone"
- Jay-Z "D.O.A. (Death of Auto-Tune)"
- Jay-Z, Rihanna and Kanye West "Run This Town"

#### THE EXPERTS SAY:



PINK Strip down the Yeah Yeah Yeahs' production, and you have beautifully written pop songs. Karen O is the poet I'll never be.

THOMAS MARS Everything David Byrne and Brian Eno do is cool. They're so conceptual and irreverent. Without Eno, our album wouldn't be on this list.

BRIAN AUBERT Phoenix's album is really shiny and lush. It's one of the most optimistic records I've heard in a while – plus, you can really move to it.



#### **VEGAS ODDS FAVOR:**

Depeche Mode 9-to-5

PHOENIX Ten years in, the French crew finally blew up with this hypercatchy collection of pop-rock gems.

#### THE EXPERTS SAY:



PATRICK STUMP "D.O.A." is timeless while being about a moment in time. In 20 years, I can see myself saying, "Thank God Hov killed that Auto-Tune trend."

**T-PAIN** Drake's song is just so catchy. The production is great.

**?UESTLOVE** I love Drake, but Kid Cudi exemplified where hip-hop is headed: Both Jay-Z and Kanye padded their latest albums with his ideas. That quasiemo electronica sound is the leader.



#### **VEGAS ODDS FAVOR:**

T.I., Justin Timberlake 8-to-5





#### She and Him's Sweet Retro-Pop Union

On their second record, the duo cover NRBQ, channel Roy Orbison By Charles Cross

HILE MANY BANDS retreat into the studio for months to make an album, She and Him make records the modern way: They multitask. Their second album, Volume Two, was recorded whenever Zooey Deschanel could spare time from acting gigs

#### IN THE STUDIO

Album Volume Two Due Out March 23rd

and when cohort M. Ward wasn't on a solo tour or out with Monsters of Folk. "We'd grab a few days here or a week there," Deschanel says. "I'm used to working on the fly."

The band's first opportunity to listen to the fully mixed album comes in a Seattle studio the day after Christmas. Deschanel seems to revel in the activity, and she's even baked macaroons for the playback. "I don't think if we went away for two months, it would be good for the songs," Ward says. Scheduling challenges meant Volume Two was recorded in Los Angeles and Portland, Oregon, in three different studios, but that's the nature of things since She and Him formed in 2007. "Songwriting is a release for me," Deschanel says. "I'd write a song and send it off to Matt to see what he thought."

Though Deschanel is married to Death Cab for Cutie's Ben Gibbard, who drops her off at the studio, she's emphatic that no one, including the label, hears any of the She and Him material until she and Ward are done. "One thing we are quite strict about," Deschanel says, "is that this is its own bubble."

This musical marriage between Ward and Deschanel, which vielded a big indie hit with the debut, continues on the follow-up with a spry, sunny mix of folk rock and pop. On the lead single, "In the Sun," Deschanel croons like Ronnie Spector, while Ward creates an acousticguitar wall of sound in the background. "Thieves" is even better, and contrasts Deschanel's increasingly confident singing with a string section that builds like a Roy Orbison classic.

If there's an offbeat, nostalgic feel to Volume Two, that's due to Ward and Deschanel's mutual thrift-store tastes. "A lot of people say we sound 'retro,'" Ward says. "I don't want it to take people to a particular place in time, just to a faraway place." Fittingly, the album's two covers are Skeeter Davis' 1964 "Gonna Get Along Without You Now" and NRBQ's 1977 "Ridin' in My Car." Says Deschanel, "If I could go back in time, I'd want to be an AM Gold artist."

# Ringo Starr's Liverpool Memories

The Beatle on his new solo LP, playing with Paul and hating cellphones By Neil Strauss

R ingo starr is sitting in the middle of an art gallery in Santa Monica, selecting his favorite songs for an iTunes celebrity playlist. It is a strange sight, because for the past six years, the Beatles' catalog has been con-

#### CHECKING IN

spicuously absent from iTunes, despite several years of rumors that the group and Apple have come to a compromise.

Wearing dark glasses and a red T-shirt emblazoned with a mug shot of Frank Sinatra, Starrappears far more sprightly than his 69 years. "I'm back into reggae, but not Bob Marley," he explains as he adds Burning Spear and Peter Tosh to his playlist, along with Sam Cooke, Michael Jackson and the first record he ever bought, "Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing," by the Four Aces.

Don Was, who plays bass on Starr's new (and 15th) album, Y Not, asks Starr whether he ever met Marley. "I didn't know Bob Marley," Starr replies in his rising-and-falling accent. "But he may have met me."

He is not being cocky. He's just been through more than he can remember. "I've been asked to do a book, but really they only want '62 to '70," he says, referring to the Beatles' peak years. "And I keep saying there'll be nine volumes before we got there, because I've had a full life."

So, instead, Starr's been slipping his story into his songs. In "The Other Side of Liverpool," on *YNot*, he sings about his father leaving the family when Ringo was three years old, his mother taking a bartending job and the friends he made working as an apprentice for a building contractor at age 17, with whom he formed his first band.

"The plan is that, if I make another CD, there will be another glimpse of Liverpool," he says, then pauses and turns to



WITH A LITTLE HELP Starr - rehearsing in Santa Monica - tapped Paul McCartney for two collaborations on his new album.

Bruce Grakal, his lawyer and friend. "That's a great title: *Another Glimpse of Liverpool*. Where the sun always shines!"

The two laugh about the ironic lyric as they walk upstairs to Was' studio. On the way, Starr explains the situation with iTunes: "Well, the iTunes thing is, you know, a three-way situation. And the Beatles are interested in it, as well as Apple, but there is no conclusion yet."

YNot is the first album Starr has basically produced himself, and, like much of his solo career in the past 20 years, he caters to nostalgia. With its self-referential lyrics sung in Starr's likable yet imperfect voice, it is catchy and wistful, but it is more an album for Ringo fans than for music fans in general.

It features two collaborations with Paul McCartney, marking the first time the two have been in a studio together in 12 years. McCartney sings on "Walk With You," a sweet, softrock paean to God and enduring friendship, and plays bass on "Peace Dream," an hommage to John Lennon, with

Starr singing the line "So try to imagine if we give peace a chance," his vocals treated similarly to Lennon's on "Imagine." "It would have been awkward if you'd have done it, but it was easier for me because I knew the man," Starr says.

Not every song deals with the Beatles. On "Fill in the Blanks," an uncharacteristically angry tune, with guitar from Joe Walsh (who happens to be married to the sister of Starr's wife), Starr complains about modern technology. "Everyone's got those dumb mobiles now," he says. "They say goodbye, then by the time they get to their car, they're calling again."

For the time being, Starr is in a new phase of productivity. He has released three solo albums in five years, a far cry from the late Eighties and early Nineties, when he went nine years without releasing a studio album, in part due to alcohol abuse. "In the early Seventies, I made my biggest solo albums," Starr says. "But by the Eighties . . . I was taking more interest in other things than what I do best."

As Starr begins to discuss his drumming style, Was enters the studio and interjects. "If you go back and listen to a song like 'Something,' he puts the fills in the same place a guitarist would," Was says. "He's not sitting there counting. He's playing to the vocal."

"I've always felt, if you're singing, I'll hold back," Starr replies. "But if you stop, I'm in! It goes back to when I was 13. I joined bands because I wanted to play with good players. That's all I've ever wanted to do. Of course the band I ended up in were really great, but it went a bit crazy."

#### Starr Time The finest moments of Ringo's post-Beatles career

John Lennon Plastic Ono Band, 1970

Months after the Beatles ended. Lennon invited Starr and bassist Klaus Voorman to be his new band on this solo masterpiece.

Ringo Starr "It Don't Come Easy," 1971 Starr's debut U.K.

single is also his best. A demo unearthed in the Nineties suggests that George Harrison actually wrote the song. Ringo Starr "Photograph," 1973

Harrison wrote this hit with Starr, who brought the Royal Albert Hall to tears when he played it at the Concert for George in 2002. Ringo Starr Ringo, 1973 By the mid-197

By the mid-1970s, the feuding Beatles could agree on one thing: They all liked Ringo. Lennon, Paul Mc-Cartney and Harrison contributed to this hit album. Tom Petty "To Find a Friend," 1994

An old friend of Petty's, Starr was asked to play on this Wildflowers track after drummer Stan Lynch quit the Heartbreakers.



On her rap nickname, her new LP and tricking out her pad - with a fish pond By Austin Scaggs

AYLOR SWIFT'S 2009? Not too shabby. The singer-songwriter became a massive pop icon last year, scoring the bestselling album (her second record, Fearless, sold 3.2 million copies), winning the Country Music Association's Entertainer of the Year award and appearing twice on Saturday Night Live. And come January 31st, Swift will be in the running for eight Grammy Awards, including Album, Record and Song of the Year. ("I'm not going to lie, that makes me happy," she says.) Then in March, Swift will kick off a sold-out, 39-date run through American stadiums and arenas before she shifts into finishing her third album, which should be out this year.

Swift's biggest event of 2010, however, will be the 20-yearold's move from her parents' house into a spiffy new penthouse condo in Nashville. "I'll be moving out, living on my own, experiencing relationships," she says. "All of that will be documented in sort of a photo-album-slash-diary, which will be this next record." To prepare for living on her own, her dad got her a tool chest for Christmas. "All of his presents were in one genre: hardware," she says. "At some point in my life on my own, I guess I'll need a screwdriver."

Were you sad or happy to see 2009 end?

I'm looking forward to 2010 like I can't even tell you. It's going to be a chance to get back into the studio. I'm always looking forward to topping what I've already done – that's the ultimate challenge: "Can I make something I'm even more proud of?"



# **Taylor Swift**

"I've been singing Shakira songs in front of my mirror into my hairbrush forever. It's like a daily routine."

I imagine your third album is mostly done.

You know me too well! I've written so much for this next record and recorded a bunch of songs already, but I don't want to give away any of the titles it's still too early in the process. I don't really write for albums as much as I just write for my life and process what I feel, whether that feeling is resentment or hope or happiness or a crush - writing songs helps me get through those moments. I like to have two years between albums, so there's enough to cover. My first record is my diary until I was 16, Fearless covered 16 to 18, and the next album will cover 18 to 20.

On New Year's Eve, you tweeted that you were working on a mixtape. What's on it? All Keith Urban songs. He has a new song called "If Ever I Could Love" that's totally on repeat for me.

Where did you watch the ball drop?

It was a low-key night. I went to dinner with my friend Hayley [Williams, from Paramore] and drove home, where my brother was having a party. I was hiding in my room listening to the dynamics of a senior-class party. There was the loud girl screaming that it was her birthday like 400 times, then there was drama when a kid got pushed into the lake and almost got hypothermia.

What was the most ridiculous thing that happened to you in 2009?

Probably rapping with T-Pain on the CMT awards. Since then,

a lot of people have been calling me T-Swizzle and T-Swezy, and I accept those nicknames with open arms.

Do you ever listen to "old" music?

I was just re-loving "The Tracks of My Tears," by Smokey Robinson. That's a perfect song. My dad used to play lots of Motown songs on our summer vacations in New Jersey. And I just dug up Linda Ronstadt's version, which is amazing.

On "SNL," you did a spot-on impersonation of Shakira. Who else can you impersonate?

I've been singing Shakira songs in front of my bathroom mirror into my hairbrush forever. It's like a daily routine. I also think my Reba McEntire is pretty spot-on.

In June you'll play a sold-out show at Gillette Stadium in Massachusetts, which holds 68,000-plus.

I'm out of my mind, wrapping my head around the fact that it sold out in 20 minutes. I was present for the meetings, and I pulled the trigger, but I never imagined that it could be a sellout, with my name on the ticket at a stadium. I'm a ridiculous overanalyzer and overplanner, so I've already started thinking about coming up with something special for that show.

You're about to move into your dream condo in downtown Nashville. It'll be tricked out, I imagine.

It's going to be my fantasy world. There's a pond in the living room, every cabinet in the kitchen is a different color, and today they're delivering a human-size bird cage, which I'll put a brass telescope in. The ceiling of my living room is painted like the night sky.

There's a pond inside the apartment?

The pond is a moat around the fireplace and may possibly have koi fish in it, depending on my commitment. You step on a steppingstone in the pond in order to get on a spiral staircase, which takes you up to the human-size bird cage observatory.

Was this idea hatched in your brain? My imagination is a twisted

place.

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# Spoon: Revenge of the Underdog

Fifteen years on, Austin's indie-rock perfectionists finally break through By Brian Hiatt

HEN SPOON FRONTman Britt Daniel
moved to a new house
in Portland, Oregon, a couple
of years ago, he spent a full six
months trying to decide what
kind of couch to buy. "I didn't
know what I liked, so I was
kind of educating myself on
it," says Daniel, who studied
design magazines on the tour
bus before deciding he liked
furniture with "short legs and
square shoulders."

Daniel, 38, makes his aesthetic decisions carefully, and then follows through with

relentless determination. That trait led him to choose a really nice sofa - and also to push Spoon to become the most rhythmically inventive and consistently tuneful American rock band of the 2000s. Along the way, they helped establish a new middle-class definition of rock success - with the support of indie label Merge Records, Spoon experienced the kind of slow and steady growth in which hit-hungry majors lost interest long ago, while picking up movie and commercial placements (Stranger Than Fiction, Jaguar) instead of platinum albums.

Daniel quit his last day job, as an online copy editor, in 2000, and with 2007's *Ga Ga* 

Ga Ga Ga, Spoon finally hit the Top 10, squeezing onto main-stream radio with the buoyant, horn-boosted "The Underdog." But the band feels under no obligation to repeat that feat with its new album, the rawer but still seductively melodic *Transference*. "I would hate being in a situation where I felt like it was expected," says Daniel, "or there was even some kind of subtle or unmentioned pressure."

Still, he doesn't need external expectations to push himself and the band hard. "I know how things should sound," Daniel says in his perpetually amused drawl, steering his lime-green 1974 biodieselconverted Mercedes through sleepy midmorning streets

in Austin, the band's hometown. "And if they don't immediately sound that way, then I'm gonna keep working until they get there." Daniel has a long, forceful nose, a slow, sardonic grin and reddish-blond hair that's been bed-headed for roughly two decades. He warms up slowly, but eventually becomes friendly and unguarded – he seems like he'd be a lousy acquaintance but a good close friend.

Daniel is a big Stanley Kubrick fan – and Spoon's songs sometimes seem to share the clinical precision of the director's films. "Britt is crazy detailoriented," confirms keyboardist Eric Harvey, sipping a beer in a heat-lamp-warmed courtyard

of an Austin hotel. "There's a lot going on in duder's head."

Bassist Rob Pope smiles. "He'll get as specific as 'I want it to sound really tough-sounding, like the bass line of an early Cure record,' something that detailed."

The group's founding members, Daniel and drummer Jim Eno, both started playing music relatively late. Eno, who admired the tasteful, play-forthe-song ethos and unconventional technique of U2's Larry Mullen Jr., R.E.M.'s Bill Berry and the Smiths' Mike Joyce, didn't start drumming until his junior year of college in North Carolina. He majored in electrical engineering and landed a series of lucrative day jobs designing microchips while he honed his drum chops - even playing in Compaq's official corporate big band in Houston.

Daniel had wanted to make records for a living since he was eight, when he discovered his first favorite band, the Bee Gees, via the Saturday Night Fever soundtrack and its discofied follow-up, 1979's Spirits Having Flown. "Still a great record," he notes. "It's no coincidence that those were my favorites – I think you have the same taste your whole life."

Around that time, Daniel's parents went through a traumatic divorce - his dad, owner of those Bee Gees records, went to Dallas, leaving Britt and his four siblings with their overburdened mom. Then, as an arty kid in the rural, jockinfested town of Temple, Texas, he faced what he remembers as a "dark and lonely" early adolescence - his 2002 song "Jonathon Fisk" is about a kid who used to beat him up. So Daniel didn't get around to actually learning an instrument until he was a black-nail-polishwearing, Cure-worshipping junior in high school - one day, he picked up a "Beatles for easy guitar" book and taught himself the chords.

Eno, who looks like a hip Michael Dukakis, first crossed paths with Daniel in an Austin studio in the early Nineties. They played together in a rootsy band called the Alien Beats (Daniel was the bassist), then broke off to form Spoon – which Daniel simply wanted to be a "loud rock & roll band."

POON HAD A ROUGH Nineties. Despite critical acclaim for their early music, the era's alt-rock boom passed them by - in what's become one of the all-time great major-label horror stories, they were dropped from Elektra within weeks of releasing their first album for the label, 1998's Series of Sneaks. "We call them the locust years," says Eno, wincing at the memory. "We pretty much toured from 1994 to 2001 in front of no one. We'd play in a town, have 20 people the first time, 40 people the second time and 15 people

work blended in with the prevailing guitar-rock style of the era, but Daniel's new songs were far more distinct. "I was feeling very vulnerable and willing to express it," he says. "And I was getting really into oldies radio and the Kinks at that time, and I stopped being afraid of doing things that would sound traditional or whatever."

It took Spoon months to find a new deal – Daniel has often thought it would have been smarter to have renamed the band and started from scratch. Nonetheless, with the spare, piano-enhanced Girls Can Tell



# "We call 1994 to 2001 the locust years," says Eno. "We toured in front of no one."

the third time! How depressing is that?"

After the major-label deal fell through, Eno refocused on his day job, which funded Spoon's continued recording. Daniel - whose radio, TV and film degree left him with little to fall back on - nearly fell apart. Blaming himself for signing to a major label in the first place, he moved to New York, started temping for Citibank and told friends he was considering law school. "I was very, very broke and very unsure of what I was going to do with my life," says Daniel. "There was some panic. Thank God I found out about drugs then, because I don't know how else I would have gone through it otherwise."

He started smoking weed for the first time since a nasty freakout in high school, and coincidentally or not, his songwriting changed: Spoon's Nineties - recorded in Eno's garage - Spoon found their niche: enigmatic lyrics, film-noir ambience, slightly askew classic-rock melodies and sharp grooves - suggesting a Ray Davies who grew up in Texas listening to Prince, Bowie, the Pixies and Elvis Costello's *Get Happy*.

Girls Can Tell began a series of collaborations with the ambitious Austin producerengineer Mike McCarthy, who was steeped in vintage-rock sonics and worked with fellow locals . . . And You Will Know Us by the Trail of Dead. Eno and Daniel describe themselves as "Type A" personalities, and McCarthy was a third: He believed Spoon were capable of making classic records, and he was willing to drive them nuts to get there. He once pushed Daniel through a hundred or so piano takes - afterward, Eno found a piece of paper by the keyboard that Daniel had covered with the words "Mike Mc-Carthy must die." As Eno and Daniel's studio skills grew – they've each produced albums for other bands – so did tensions. McCarthy and Spoon's quest for vintage-pop perfection reached its peak with six months of grueling sessions for Ga Ga Ga Ga Ga - which Daniel was determined not to repeat this time.

After working briefly with Fiona Apple producer Jon Brion – who had produced "The Underdog" – Daniel and Eno ended up producing *Transference* themselves, with Daniel attempting to defeat his own perfectionism in the process. "I wanted to leave in the mistakes whenever I could stand them," says Daniel, who nevertheless ended up taking the recordings back to his home in Portland and tweaking them in his basement for a month.

Daniel writes and records sober, but finds he's often best at evaluating his work when he's stoned. And for the band's relatively loose live shows, a few beers are mandatory for everyone except Eno. "Britt has got to do that just to turn off some of those mental functions," says keyboardist Harvey.

"And I think sloppiness and mistakes are also encouraged," adds Pope.

Harvey laughs. "I didn't get that memo."

Daniel, who's had his share of therapy, describes himself as something of a somber dude - "I'm not wired to be an upwith-people person." He's still working on his relationship skills - he mutters something about "girl trouble" one night - but success and time have begun to brighten his outlook. "Got Nuffin," the second-to-last track on Transference, is the most hopeful Spoon song ever: Over buzzing guitars that recall his earliest music, Daniel yelps, "Got nothing to lose but darkness and shadows."

Daniel knows the song is uncharacteristically optimistic. "The first lyrics I wrote for it were about that feeling I get when me and the band meet up in some place like Portugal – it's a brotherhood thing," he says, looking up from his breakfast taco. "It's a good kind of family – the kind of family I always wanted to have."

## Willie Mitchell, Memphis Soul Mastermind

Hi Records producer who discovered and recorded Al Green dies at 81

By Austin Scaggs

ILLIE MITCHELL, the visionary producer, songwriter, engineer and bandleader who discovered Al Green and who modernized the gritty Southern-soul sound of the 1970s, died on January 5th in Memphis, his hometown. He was 81. "He was the Mecca of soul and R&B," Green said. "We're just glad we had him for so long."

Over six decades, Mitchell worked on more than 100 gold and platinum records, including his string of hits with Green and records by Bobby "Blue" Bland, Ike and Tina Turner, Ann Peebles, Boz Scaggs, Keith Richards and Rod Stewart. "He was one of the great soul-music masters, and a true gentleman," says Stewart, who tapped Mitchell to produce 1975's Atlantic Crossing and, most recently, to contribute horn and string arrangements to his latest album, Soulbook.

Mitchell was born in Ashland, Mississippi, in 1928. When he was eight, he got a trumpet for Christmas. "Music has been my whole life," Mitchell said in 2003. "I just can't live without it." By 18, he was living in Memphis, fronting a 10-piece jazz band and playing trumpet on some of B.B. King's earliest recordings. The group was the hottest in town - even Elvis Presley hired Mitchell's band to play his annual New Year's parties.

By the early Sixties, Mitchell had begun assembling one of the all-time great soul bands, including brothers Mabon "Teenie" Hodges (on guitar), Leroy Hodges (bass) and Charles Hodges (organ), and drummers Al Jackson Jr. and Howard Grimes - the same group that would back Green as the internationally renowned Hi Rhythm Section. "He picked his musicians from the very crème de la crème," says Richards. "He provided a backdrop that could bring out the best in artists as disparate as Carla Thomas and me."



SOUL MEN Green and Mitchell at Memphis' Royal Studios in 2003. Mitchell discovered Green in Texas in 1968.

#### Royal Studios' Soul Sound

Willie Mitchell wrote, produced or arranged more than 100 crucial soul hits. Here are seven of the best

#### Willie Mitchell

"20-75," 1964 Before Mitchell was known as a producer, he was a bandleader with a string of floor-filling instrumental hits. The first is a supercharged brass-andguitar blues stomp.

#### Al Green

"Let's Stay Together," 1971 Mitchell co-wrote Green's first Number One single, an irresistible blend of swagger (Al Jackson Jr.'s galloping rhythm) and tenderness (Green's vulnerable vocal) underscored by pillowy strings and organ.

#### Otis Clay "Trying to Live My Life Without You," 1972

It's best known via Bob Seger's 1981 cover, but the original is one of Mitchell's toughest productions, shoving Clay's beatendown snarl right up against its crisp, snappy groove.

#### **Ann Peebles**

"I Can't Stand the Rain," 1973 John Lennon called Peebles' biggest hit "the greatest record I've heard in two years." A dissonant "raindron" riff - repurposed by Missy Elliott 24 years later - introduces a barn-burning performance. with a typically brilliant Mitchell horn chart.

#### Al Green "Call Me (Come Back Home)," 1973

There's a lot more going on here than Green's lead vocal. **Guitarist Teenie** Hodges solos. gorgeously, for the entire length of the song; his brother Charles' organ chords ripple like a lake in summer.

#### Syl Johnson "Take Me to the

River," 1975 The first of many covers of this secular Baptist anthem (originally an Al Green album cut) was a Top 10 R&B hit, showcasing Johnson's tart, demanding voice and the bluesy squall of his harmonica.

#### O.V. Wright

"Into Something (Can't Shake Loose)," 1977 One of Mitchell's final charting singles as a producer ingeniously streamlines the loping Memphis groove into something that could pass for disco.

DOUGLAS WOLK

Mitchell first encountered a 20-year-old Green in Midland, Texas, in 1969, when Green was booked to open for Mitchell's group. "His hair was shiny, conked back in a perfect wave," Green wrote in his 2000 autobiography, Take Me to the River. "I could see diamonds and gold winking from the rings on his fingers, cigarette smoke curled up around his mustache."

After the show, Mitchell offered to mentor the young singer. "I was trying to sing like Jackie Wilson and Sam Cooke and Wilson Pickett and Otis Redding," Green said. "He'd tell me, 'Slow it down, soften it up, feel what you're singing.' What Willie was trying to bring out in me was something more private and personal, something I was almost afraid to let another person hear."

In 1970, Mitchell became vice president of Hi Records - based at the famed Royal Studios in south Memphis - where Mitchell produced, arranged and engineered Al Green Gets Next to You. The disc yielded Hi's first million-selling single, "Tired of Being Alone," and for the next five years the pair churned out hit after hit: "Let's Stay Together" (co-written by Mitchell), "Love and Happiness," "Call Me (Come Back Home)" and "I'm Still in Love With You." Green called the latter a "gorgeous arrangement, seamlessly blending horns, strings and vocals until the whole thing sounded like it might float away on a pink and gold cloud."

Green and Mitchell reunited for I Can't Stop in 2003 and Everything's OK two years later. "Willie knows me," Green told RS at the time. "He knows where I sound sweet."

No other producer has ever exactly replicated the warm, liquid R&B sound Mitchell captured on Hi's Seventies records. Some, including the late Memphis music legend Jim Dickinson, credited the tube equipment at Royal Studios, or suggested the former movie house's slanted floor somehow enriched the recordings. Mitchell agreed, but he added, "There is a secret, a couple little things I do. But I'm not telling."



# Late-Night Bloodbath

Forget 'Lost' - Conan O'Brien and Jay Leno's battle over 'The Tonight Show' is the best and bloodiest drama on television By Rob Sheffield

AY LENO - HE PLAYED this one beautifully. Five years ago, when NBC turned Leno into a time bomb by promising his job to Conan O'Brien, he ticked quietly, keeping his rage to himself - but, oh, how it must have burned. Now he gets to taste the sweet nectar of vengeance. By sucking so bad that NBC could no longer tolerate him in prime time, he sucked his way right back into his old job. The tragedy of all this is that NBC has somehow turned two winning hands into a lose-thefarm fold.

We've never seen Conan pissed off before, and it suits him. Now that he's showing his claws, he's finally proving himself fit for the job just as he walks away from it. His charm has always been his refusal to act like we owe him anything; he doesn't have the angst or neurosis that drives Jay and Dave. If he did, he'd be unbearable. (Actually, he'd be Norm MacDonald - same thing.) Early in his career, he got lucky breaks because people liked him. Nobody wants to see a lucky guy get mad - it's bad manners, and for Conan, bad manners is bad comedy.

In rage mode, Conan is funnier than he's been since moving to 11:35. But it's strange to see him tangle with Jay. We're used to seeing Letterman rage at NBC, CBS and Sarah Palin. Dave thrives on conflict - as he joked, he's the product of "Lutheran Midwestern guilt." Leno and O'Brien seem like nice Catholic boys, most comfortable when everyone's getting along. Yet behind Leno's Guy Smiley-Muppet mask, he's a killing machine - the Terminator of late-night comedians.

Conan's a writer and Jay's a performer, and you can't overstate how different those mentalities are. Jay got *The Tonight Show* after getting up in front of hostile drunks in countless shitty late-night dives around the country, year in and year out, and making those assholes laugh. Conan got the job by being funny in a room full of other writers. This isn't to slight either of them – but Jay has always been tougher and darker than people realize.

Leno doesn't need TV. He could just go to Vegas and make more money doing what he loves best, which is stand-up. Last year he told ROLLING STONE he banked his Tonight

Show money and lived on his stand-up earnings.

So why did he hang around NBC long enough to bring the whole network down in flames? Maybe he just felt pushed around. Leno's got the stomach for fights. Like Paul McCartney, another nice guy wrongly dismissed as a cream puff, Jay made his bones in the sleaziest, nastiest showbiz shark pools on earth. He plays nice for the

#### THE WATCH LIST

#### **Damages**

Mondays, 10 p.m., FX

At least one good thing came out of the Bernie Madoff mess: the perfect story line for the third season of FX's elegantly pulpy legal thriller. Lily Tomlin, Martin Short and Campbell Scott join star Glenn Close's master class in the flared-nostril art of restrained overacting.

#### Caprica

Fridays, 9 p.m., SyFy

This long-awaited prequel to Battlestar Galactica more than lives up to last spring's pilot. Eric Stoltz is unexpectedly terrifying as the mad scientist who invents the Cylons, setting the stage for humanity's destruction.

old ladies, but his street-fighting instincts are off the charts. He's left plenty of carrion on the late-night highway. Arsenio Hall, Chevy Chase, Magic Johnson – Jay knocked them all off the air, and you can bet he still savors the memory of their death cries.

But it's tempting for any late-night host to believe he's the star, rather than the show: Medically, this is known as Arsenio Syndrome. But people watch The Tonight Show because it's on, not because they like it. Conan and Jay respect this - they knew that once they're off the air, people might miss them for a few nights, but then they'll watch whoever the next guy is. (Who weeps for Craig Kilborn now?) Conan has shown he's shrewd and confident enough to move on, and wherever he goes, he'll be funnier than he was on NBC. Jay could have walked away from the whole brawl before it began - but then, he's in it for the fight, not the funny.

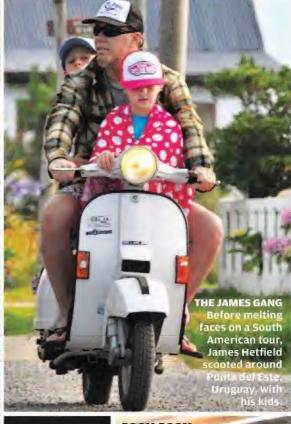
One of the reasons late-night shows go so horribly wrong so often is that the physical toll of the job is different from other gigs. It requires stamina, psychic isolation and an inability to get bored. As late-night failure Dennis Miller said years ago to the ultimate late-night ironman, Tom Snyder, "You guys are resilient. You come out here every night, you look interested. Me, by Wednesday, I'd be so disinterested, I'd look like I'd been shot with Thorazine." (If you ever watched Miller's show, you probably felt like you'd been shot with Thorazine yourself.)

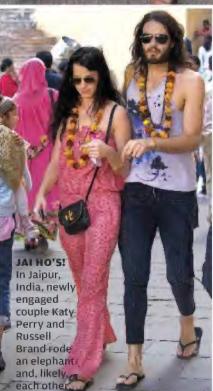
Jav and Conan both have this stamina, and it's extraordinarily rare. There are only a few guys alive who have the freakazoid DNA to do the job. Yet NBC has lost Conan with nothing to show for it except for more Jay, whose prime-time flameout leaves him smelling like a week-old Happy Meal. It's one of the most horrific network fuckups in history, and at this point, nobody knows how gory the endgame will look. But one thing is for sure: We'll never have to see Jay Leno at 10:00 again. Hey, anybody know if Arsenio is busy?

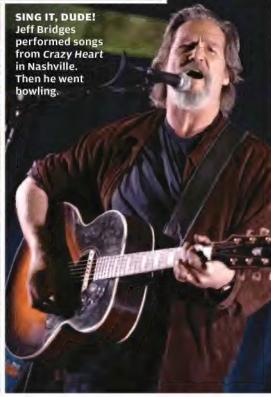
"I am appalled when I'm called a diva. I've never done a diva-ish thing in my life." -Mariah Carey

# Random Notes











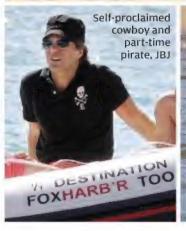


#### **Permanent Vacation**

Normal folks get stuck in airports, traffic jams and at Grandma's house over Xmas, eating honey-baked ham and fruitcake. But rockers get to hit exotic sun-drenched locales with their honeys. Rihanna, Nikki Sixx and Ozzy Osbourne all played in the sand, while Bruce Springsteen and Jon Bon Jovi dissed Snooki and the gang on the Shore, instead heading for St. Barths. No baked ziti for you!









# \*\*\*NATIONAL \*\* AFFAIRS \*\*



# The Eco-Warrior

President Obama has appointed the most progressive EPA chief in history – and she's moving swiftly to clean up the mess left by Bush

\* By Tim Dickinson \*

HEN IT COMES TO PASSing major legislation –
reforming health care,
reining in Wall Street,
curbing climate change – the Obama administration is under fire from all sides for
bowing to special interests and conducting government business behind closed
doors. But there's one agency where the
hope and hype of the campaign trail have
transitioned seamlessly into effective
governance: the Environmental Protection Agency.

With a minimum of fanfare, new EPA administrator Lisa Jackson has established herself as the agency's most progressive chief ever – and one of the most powerful members of Obama's Cabinet. In her first year on the job, Jackson has not only turned the page on the industry-friendly and often illegal policies of the Bush

era, but has embarked on an aggressive campaign to clean up the nation's air and drinking water. Under her leadership, the EPA has sought stricter limits on toxic pollutants like mercury, moved to scrub emissions of arsenic and heavy metals from coal-fired plants, and revoked a permit for the nation's largest mountaintop-removal coal mine. "The American people can be outraged when we're not living up to the *P* part of our name," Jackson says. "The *protection* part."

Even more striking, Jackson has expanded the EPA's mandate to include sweeping new powers to crack down on climate-warming pollution from cars and industry. The move, which has the full backing of the White House, could prove to be the only viable way to stop Big Oil and Big Coal from overheating the planet – especially after the disastrous col-

lapse of climate talks in Copenhagen in December. "If Congress doesn't pass legislation on climate change," says Carol Browner, Obama's climate czar, "EPA will follow through under the requirements of the Clean Air Act."

Taken together, Jackson's efforts represent a sweeping attempt to revitalize an agency that was gutted during the Bush years. The goal, as she sees it, is to once again base environmental regulations on science and the law – not on the demands of well-connected industries. "Under Jackson, it's a whole new ballgame," says Eric Schaeffer, who resigned as the agency's director of environmental enforcement in protest over Bush policies. "You now have an EPA administrator who has White House support but is still tough enough to provide an independent voice for the environment."

HEN JACKSON WAS appointed in December 2008, some prominent environmentalists considered her the wrong person for the job. During her tenure as head of New Jersey's Department of Environmental Protection, they pointed out, the state did such a dismal job of cleaning up toxic Superfund sites that even the Bush administration felt compelled to take them over. In a separate case, Jackson's unit discovered that a day-care facility housed in a former thermometer factory was exposing toddlers to mercury pollution, yet failed to alert parents for more than three months. "Under her watch, New Jersey's environment only got dirtier, incredible as that may seem," Jeff Ruch, president of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, said at the time. "If past is prologue, one cannot reasonably expect meaningful change if she is appointed to lead EPA."

In the early going, Ruch's warning appeared prescient. Jackson kicked off her tenure at EPA by greenlighting more than two dozen permits for mountaintopremoval coal mining that were held over from the Bush administration. "This mining is devastating Appalachia," warned Robert F. Kennedy Jr. "Everyone expected Obama to do something about it. Instead they're saying, 'We're going to let this happen."

Jackson herself now admits that those initial approvals were mishandled. "In hindsight, I certainly wish we could have gone through a longer process on some of those," she says. In September, the EPA put 79 permits for mountaintop removal on hold, pending a review to ensure that each complies with the Clean Water Act. In an unprecedented move, the agency also revoked a permit for the Spruce No. 1 mine, Appalachia's largest mountaintop-removal operation, observing that it would destroy seven miles of West Virginia streams already ravaged by mining.

In addition, Jackson tells Rolling Stone, the EPA is reviewing the infamous Bush "fill rule" that allows mining companies to bury streams and lakes with mining rubble in the first place. "Staff is working on it now," she says. "We haven't put anything about it out publicly." Jackson says the primary goal is to reform gold mining in Alaska – where miners have begun dumping toxic waste into a pristine lake near Juneau – but adds that the move may also "curtail" mountaintopremoval mining.

Today, environmentalists who fretted openly about Jackson's nomination are almost unanimous in singing her praises. "Parts of the environmental community were skeptical of her appointment," says Buck Parker, former executive director of the environmental-law firm Earthjustice. "But she's fantastic. Gutsy. Acts

in accordance with what she says. She's proving to be one of the bright lights of the administration."

Most afternoons, you can find Jackson at EPA's headquarters in the old Post Office headquarters, a marble art-deco monument to an era when postmasters were kings. Her sprawling office is paneled, floor to ceiling, in old-growth walnut, and decorated with bright abstract art from the National Gallery. Near a copy of *The Lorax*, the Dr. Seuss environmental parable, Jackson keeps a photograph of Sen. James Inhofe, perhaps the most rabid anti-environmental zealot in Congress, surrounded by his grandchildren.

"We don't have rancor," Jackson says of the senator, who gave her the photo. "I keep it here to remind me that you gotta work with people. You gotta figure it out."

Jackson has a master's degree in chemical engineering from Princeton, and nearly two decades of experience directing the cleanup of toxic waste. But from her first day, she discovered, her most important skill was her ability to shift the attitude of

their industry buddies from environmental regulations."

"They have freed up agency employees to do what they're supposed to do: protect public health and the environment," says Jeremy Symons, the EPA's former climatepolicy adviser. "And God knows there's a lot of pent-up work behind the dam that needs to be unleashed."

UCH OF JACKSON'S FIRST year at the EPA, in fact, has been eaten up by reversing the worst of the Bush legacy. "It requires that we use our time and resources to look back," she says, "when we absolutely need to be moving ahead."

In one of its final acts, the Bush EPA effectively barred new oversight of oil refineries with a regulatory trick: It covered up the overall impact of a refinery's pollution by measuring every smokestack separately, as if each were operating in isolation. "Imagine if you had 10 smokers in a room and a baby in the middle," says Schaeffer, the former enforcement director. "You're trying to figure the impact on that baby's

# Agency insiders have a name for veteran staffers who were shunted aside during the Bush years: "cryogenically frozen."

staffers who remain stuck in the Bush-era mind-set that the EPA should weaken environmental enforcement to satisfy the demands of big polluters.

"Oftentimes we're in a meeting and somebody starts telling me, 'Well, we already know what this official – usually a local official – really wants.' I tell them I don't want to know that," she says. "I want to know what the science says. Even now they're surprised to hear me say that."

To shift the agency's culture, Jackson has moved swiftly to restore top career staffers who were shunted aside during the Bush years. "We call them 'cryogenically frozen,'" says a top aide to Jackson. "We've reactivated a lot of people who were known to disagree with the Bush administration's politics and were hung up in closets." Veteran staffers who have gotten their old jobs back say privately that they spent eight years under Bush "trying to do something good under the radar" – even as they were forced to design programs that "we all knew the courts were going to throw out."

Under Jackson, the agency is once again basing decisions on science rather than politics. "The science is not something the Obama administration feels they have to guard themselves against," says one cleanair staffer who was sidelined under Bush. "Because they are not trying to protect lungs, but you model the smoke from each cigarette and assume that's all you have in the room. There wasn't any science behind it."

Jackson summarily revoked the oilfriendly rule in October. She also jettisoned lax smog rules set under Bush that flouted the unanimous recommendation of independent scientists and allowed higher pollution levels – effectively sentencing hundreds of people a year to premature death. "This is one of the most important protection measures we can take to safeguard our health," Jackson said in sending the rules back to the drawing board. In January, the agency proposed strict new smog limits that are expected to be finalized later this year.

After having its budget sharply curtailed under Bush, the EPA now has its biggest budget in history – thanks to an increase of \$3 billion under Obama. The additional resources have enabled Jackson to put dozens of new federal cops on the environmental beat, and to crack down on states that fail to enforce the law. Chief among those states is Texas, where Gov. George Bush shifted the state to a system of "flexible permits" that allow oil refineries, chemical plants and other industrial polluters to increase toxic emissions as they modernize their facilities. Last summer, Jackson lowered the boom on Texas –

NATIONAL AFFAIRS ...

first by sending an order to Gov. Rick Perry that rejected key elements of the state's regulatory implementation plan, then by descending on the state EPA office in person, accompanied by top enforcement officials from Washington.

"It was an army of people – I've never seen anything like that," says Neil Carman, director of clean-air programs for the Texas chapter of the Sierra Club. "We've got the attention of the highest level of people at the EPA, and they're going after it. We've waited 15 years to see this happen."

Advocates of environmental justice are also thrilled by Jackson's emphasis on protecting vulnerable communities that lack lobbying clout. She has started by filling the EPA, long a bastion of whiteness in Washington, with young aides who represent minority groups hard hit by pollution: the nearly three-fourths of Hispanics who live in communities that fail to meet cleanair standards, African-Americans who are more than twice as likely as whites to die from asthma, Native Americans whose homes lack clean water at almost 10 times the national rate. For Jackson, who grew up in the Ninth Ward of New Orleans, near the toxic corridor known as "Cancer Alley," such realities are a major reason she joined the EPA right out of grad school.

"What I'm trying to do is bring the agency back to being closer to the communities that are fighting for environmental protection," she says. "Because that's how environmental protection gets done – it usually comes from the communities up."

The shift to a more communityfocused approach is already having an effect. When Emily Enderle, an environmental-health advocate with Earthjustice, recently petitioned the EPA to protect children exposed to dangerous pesticides, she was amazed to see the agency respond in

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only three weeks by initiating the process to create a new regulation.

"We didn't have any of the big green groups supporting this," Enderle says. "But they were very supportive of protecting rural kids who've been poisoned by nervetoxic pesticides."

Jackson has moved with equal dispatch to clean up the nation's drinking water. After a storage facility loaded with coal ash collapsed in Tennessee in 2008 – creating a toxic spill 100 times larger than the *Exxon Valdez* – the EPA quickly disclosed previously secret information about 44 other "high hazard" storage facilities. The agency has also targeted 104 chemicals to be added to the Safe Drinking Water Act – a move that would more

an unhinged eco-vigilante, her approach to regulating carbon emissions has been as serious as the Bush administration's was slapdash. Jackson has moved incrementally to make sure the agency's rulings stand up to inevitable legal challenges. "One of the worst of the legacies left after the eight years of the Bush administration was the number of regulations that were overturned," she says. "I am not a lawyer by training; I am an engineer. So I am very, very careful about getting good legal advice on the decisions that I am entrusted to make."

In one of the first decisions that Obama entrusted to Jackson, she reversed the Bush EPA and granted California the authority to curb carbon pollution from auto

## In January, the EPA began an inventory of big industrial polluters, paving the way for a first-ever cap on carbon emissions.

than double the 91 toxic substances currently subject to regulation.

In addition, Jackson is working with Congress to require all chemical manufacturers to prove that their compounds are safe *before* they enter the environment. "Safety standards cannot be applied without adequate information," says Jackson, "and responsibility for providing that information should rest on industry."

HE BIGGEST FIGHT THAT
Jackson faces, however, is her
effort to regulate auto exhaust
and other climate pollution
under the Clean Air Act. While friends
of industry have tried to paint Jackson as

exhaust. That alone, she says, was enough to bring the automakers to the table to negotiate national limits on emissions, rather than face a patchwork of conflicting state regulations. "Once you get to the point where industry asks for regulatory certainty," Jackson says, "that's always a watershed moment in environmental protection." Spurred by the threat of regulation, automakers agreed to raise the fuel efficiency of cars to 35 miles per gallon by 2016, an accord that will reduce future carbon pollution by nearly 1 billion tons.

The EPA followed up in December by issuing an "endangerment finding" that gives the agency the authority to cap car-

THREAT ASSESSMEN World gets new tallest b**uilding** THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE SCARY Congress allows D.C. Dominos admits its pizza sucked, Germany cuts Obama names to legalize medical changes recipe. first-ever greenhouse marijuana. emissions transgender Study: Amnesty for 9 percent in appointee. illegal immigrants would create \$1.5 trillion in GDP. • WITH US Warren Beatty Two makes a run on Wilt Argentine Sen. Chris Dodd Chamberlain with men wed (D-Wall St.) drops 12,775 alleged in South re-election bid. Number of cars on conquests. America's American roadways first gay drops by 4 million. marriage Montana legalizes assisted suicide.



bon pollution under the Clean Air Act. The move was required, Jackson says, by the Supreme Court decision in 2007 that greenhouse gases are a pollutant subject to regulation – a ruling ignored by the Bush White House. Jackson would prefer to curb carbon pollution with the kind of cap-and-trade system being considered by Congress: "Economy-wide, market-based legislation would be a better path," she says. But in the absence of legislative action, Jackson insists that she alone now has the tools to place America on the path to President Obama's target of reducing carbon emissions by 83 percent by 2050.

In January, the EPA began tracking the emissions of the large industrial pollut-

ers responsible for 85 percent of America's carbon pollution. That inventory will be completed within a year, paving the way for a first-ever cap on carbon emissions. In the meantime, polluters that want to expand their operations will be required, beginning this spring, to incorporate the "best available methods" for controlling emissions. "I've tried very hard to make sure regulation is common sense," says Jackson. "Not with an eye to developing some doomsday, all-powerful regulatory scenario, but to show folks once again the tremendous power of the Clean Air Act."

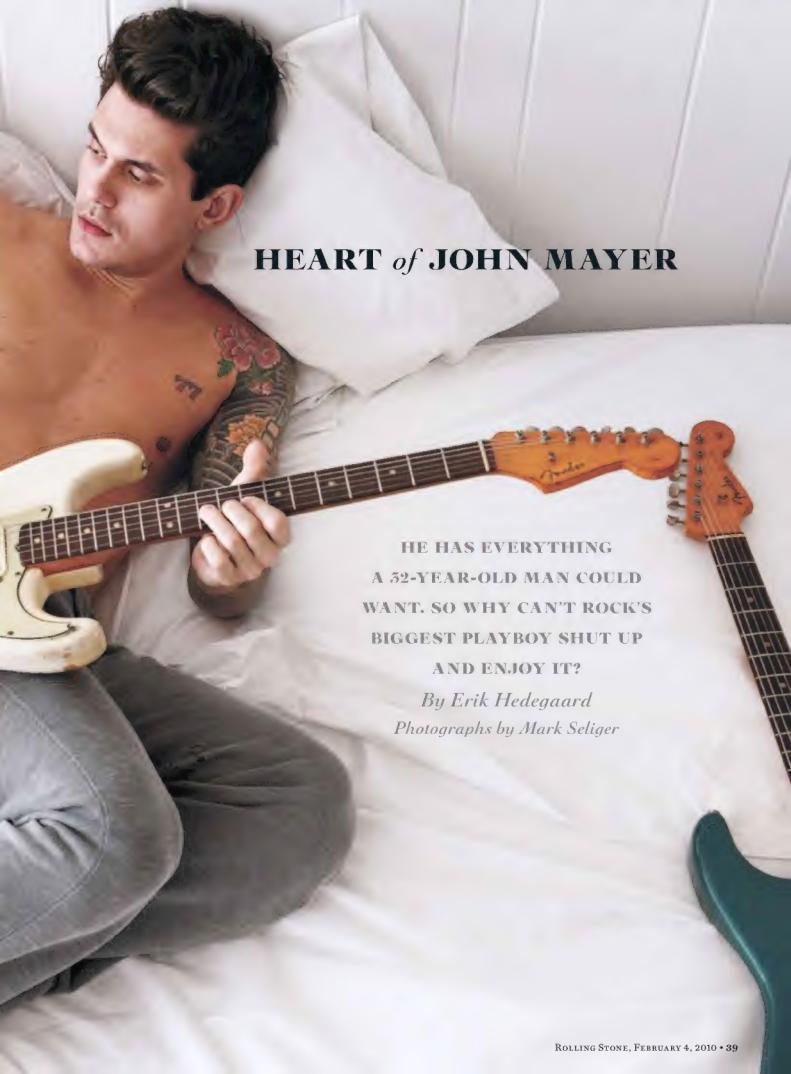
Jackson's critics say it's too soon to judge her true commitment to change. Ruch, who denounced her nomination, downplays the EPA's early accomplishments, saying many hard decisions are simply being "ducked or delayed." Case in point: the agency's extended review of permits for mountaintop-removal mining. On January 5th, the very first mine to make it through the process was approved.

Still, the greatest evidence that Jackson is serious about environmental protection may be those who are trying to curb her power. These days, pro-industry Republicans aren't the only ones trying to stymie the EPA. In a move designed to gain support from coal-state Democrats, the climate bill passed by the House would strip the agency of its authority to restrict climate pollution. Rep. Earl Pomeroy, a Democrat from North Dakota, has introduced stand-alone legislation that would do the same. And Rep. David Obey, the powerful and progressive chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, recently added a last-minute rider to a spending bill that exempted Great Lakes shippers from strict new curbs that the EPA has imposed on diesel emissions from ships. The move - a transparent favor for Murphy Oil, a diesel-fuel refinery in Obey's district - undercuts a rule aimed at saving 12,000 lives a year.

Such maneuvers reveal how difficult it will be for Jackson to move forward on her commitment to craft environmental regulations based on scientific reality, not political favoritism. As with health care reform, a handful of Democrats in Congress could prove influential in undercutting the Obama administration's efforts to defend the environment and safeguard public health. "When it comes to something that threatens the pocketbooks of their own region," says Parker, the former head of Earthjustice, "traditional friends may turn out to be just as bad as Republicans."







OHN MAYER GOES OUT TO A club, any club, he feels bad about it if some big host man makes someone get up from the banquette and take their Grey Goose elsewhere so the skinny rock star with the weirdly elevated hair can sit down. It doesn't exactly thrill him, either, when he's got to take a leak, and the line is long, and now the big man

guarding the bathroom is making some dude hop on both feet so that Mr. Your Body Is a Wonderland can cut in and go first. It's embarrassing. But you know what he says is even worse? He sees a girl, any girl, and makes his move. He's a little tipsy. They end up in

a room. Good things start happening. But then suddenly the girl's up on her feet and walking out. Mayer says this has happened to him more than once, so he knows what she's thinking: "Wait till I tell my friends I turned down John Mayer!" And it doesn't stop there. She turns to him, this girl he had longed for, however briefly, felt a connection with, felt hope. "Hey," she says, "before I go, can I have your autograph?"

Some time after the latest awful episode, he's downing a few Old-Fashioneds at a Los Angeles beautiful-people watering hole. Resplendent in a black-leather slant-zip jacket, obscure Japanese kicks and insanely expensive vintage Rolex, he's charging forward in his typical hyperbolic Mayerian way, saying stuff like "Blowing me off is the new sucking me off!" and "This is the death of rock & roll!" Suggest that maybe he's exaggerating, and he takes deep umbrage, jackknifing his long body forward. "No, man, and after that happens eight, nine times, I'd rather just go home and RedTube, good night. I'm serious."

And he looks serious, too. So maybe that really is his situation, despite who he is. Sure, lots of people don't like him and his

music, too poppy, too sensitive, his head is

ers. Since 2001, he's released four studio albums, starting with Room for Squares, that have all been big successes, with hit songs like "Your Body Is a Wonderland," "Daughters" and "Waiting on the World to Change." And while his newest record, Battle Studies, isn't up to his previous one, Continuum (an assessment even Mayer agrees with: "I know that I'm supposed to say that my newest is the best one. Bullshit. Continuum is my best one. And I think you gain more than you lose by saying that"), it debuted at Number One. In fact, commercially, Mayer has never come close to failing. He's a golden boy (whose label, Columbia, had the good sense to sign him to a 10-year Fort Knox-size deal in 2008). Meanwhile, for better or worse, he's become a kind of inescapable pop-culture

too big, he uses the word "meta" too often.

But his guitar chops, especially in the blue-

sy area, are unquestionably great, and he

can count Eric Clapton among his admir-

staple. He's huge on Twitter, where he is an acknowledged modern-day master of the lowbrow bon mot, having amassed a fan base of 2,919,691 souls who hang on his every "My mouth is the Don King of my penis" and "I thought I had to fart but it turned out it was just a poop." He's everywhere in the gossip press, often in connection with celebrity ex-girlfriends, the last being Jennifer Aniston, who followed Minka Kelly, who followed Jessica Simpson, etc. And every time he sees a paparazzi, he can't help himself, he's got to act out; just the other day, he and his friend the well-known lesbian Samantha Ronson engaged in a bit of hot up-against-the-walloral-sex silliness for the cameras. Really good stuff.

But here he sits tonight, leather jacket pulled in tight against an early-evening chill, big soulful puppy-dog eyes looking more pensive than usual. Momentarily, he stands up to try to get a propane porch heater started. It frustrates him. He clicks away, no luck, turns, sits down, gets up, tries once more, no luck, gets someone else to do it, eyeballs some girls at a nearby table, says nothing to them ("When it's time, my mouth will just start going"), returns to his drink. Soon enough, he starts in on that one area of his life that he is most consumed by and least happy with.

He thinks about it constantly. He talks about it endlessly. He wants a girlfriend, a real life-partner girlfriend. It's been a long time. And it's just not happening.

"All I want to do now is fuck the girls I've already fucked, because I can't fathom explaining myself to somebody who can't believe I'd be interested in them, and they're going, 'But you're John Mayer!' So I'm going backwards to move forward. I'm too freaked out to meet anybody else."

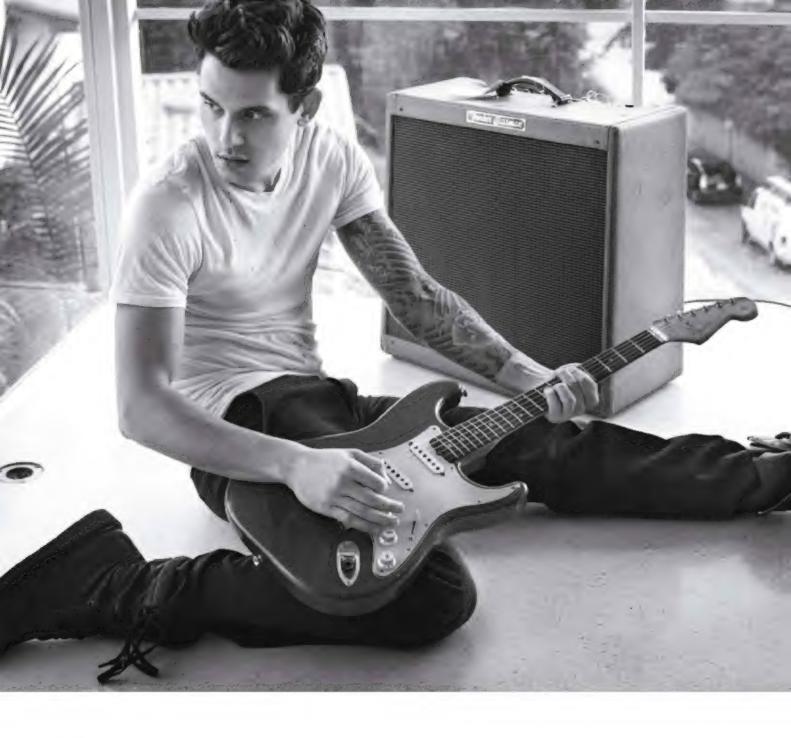
He puts down his drink.

"What do you think?" he says. "Do you think it's going to take meeting someone who I admire more than I admire myself? But isn't it also about a beautiful vagina? Aren't we talking about a matrix of a couple of different things here? Like, you need to have them be able to go toe-to-toe with you intellectually. But don't they also have to have a vagina you could pitch a tent on and just camp out on for, like, a weekend? Doesn't that have to be there, too? The Joshua Tree of vaginas?"

And so the search continues. He knows she is out there. And he will not stop until he finds her, and her Joshua Tree of vaginas.

Erik Hedegaard profiled James Cameron in RS 1094/1095.

WHEN IT COMES TO FINDING A GIRLFRIEND, MAYER SAYS HE'S LOOKING FOR "THE JOSHUA TREE OF YAGINAS." ROLLING STONE, FEBRUARY 4, 2010 • 41



T'S 4 A.M. AT HIS PLACE IN CALAbasas, 30 miles northwest of L.A., which he rented to record Battle Studies in. On any given night, he's still awake. He's maybe watched a little 30 Rock, South Park or Family Guy, his favorite TV shows. He's smoked a little weed, gotten a nice little buzz working, hit the SEND button on a few Twitters and lost himself in Modern Warfare 2. All cozy in sweatpants and a hoodie, he usually turns in now; if he hasn't by 7 a.m., it's time for a Xanax or an Ambien. When he gets up, usually around noon, he drinks some coffee, eats breakfast, brushes his teeth, hits the shower and stands in front of a great big closet (he spent about \$200,000 on clothes last year) asking himself one of life's more important questions: "Who the fuck do I want to be today?"

His choices, he says, generally boil down to "urban technical, Japanese schoolboy, white Jay-Z or skinny, sleek rock guy." He hasn't done Japanese schoolboy in a while but today slips into skinny, sleek rock guy, in black cargo pants and a pair of white Mastermind sneakers. As the day wears on, he might call his shrink, which he does on "an as-needed basis." He might practice the Israeli fighting art of Krav Maga, which he got totally into after breaking up with a girl and deciding to "get good at something she doesn't know about." He might call his friend Bob, a fellow vintage-watch nut, to discuss their collections. Mayer's is worth at least \$20 million; he can recite his holdings by heart; he knows all the numbers; he once stumbled across a rare Rolex dial variant, which is now known as "the Mayer dial." An obsessive, he has also collected sneakers, ladies' handbags, cameras, lots of stuff. He owns a bulletproof vest – "I looked up California penal code 12022.2, subsection B. In this state, I'm legally allowed to wear it" – and wants to own an M4A1 assault rifle, "just to go, 'Look what I have that no one else has.'" He once got magician David Blaine to teach him how to hold his breath and then did so for four minutes, 17 seconds, no tricks involved, which says a lot about the kind of guy he is: tenacious, nutty and blue-in-the-face sometimes.

Later on, in a restaurant or club, he will have to take a leak and head straight for a stall. ("I've got to go to the stall. I can't get a good flow going when I'm out in the world. But then, of course, you run the risk of people thinking you shit all the time." He endures.) In the evening, he favors single-



fection. It's about not caring. So, it's not really about poop at all."

This is pure Mayer talk. Nothing is what it seems. He operates in layers of meaning, where a poop joke is so much more than a poop joke. "He's a student of cause and effect," says Chad Franscoviak, Mayer's sound engineer and sometime roommate for the past 10 years. "And he'd be a phenomenal chess player, because he knows all the moves so many steps ahead. That's just how he operates."

"I am the new generation of masturbator," Mayer says later on, out of the blue, apropos of nothing, really. "I've seen it all. Before I make coffee, I've seen more butt holes than a proctologist does in a week."

Does this new generation of masturbator masturbate every day?

"I don't like that question, because it seeks to make me sound strange if I say for me and my music. I almost go blind. But then two weeks ago, it occurred to me, 'John' – if I can use my own name with myself – 'The only reason you're going through these trials is because you're brave enough to say, "I don't want to detach. I don't want to go live in a gated community." So, I will continue to make these worldwide dignity mistakes as often as it takes to not make them anymore."

ow MAYER GOT TO BE like this is kind of a mystery. He grew up in the leafy Connecticut town of Fairfield, the middle son of level-headed professional educators. His mom, Margaret, was an English teacher; his dad, Richard, some 20 years his mom's senior, was a high school principal, and Mayer wasn't anything like them. A class

#### "I AM THE NEW GENERATION OF MASTURBATOR. I HAVE MASTURBATED MYSELF OUT OF SERIOUS PROBLEMS IN MY LIFE."

'yes,' but of course I do. I mean, I have masturbated myself out of serious problems in my life. The phone doesn't pick up because I'm masturbating. And I have excused myself at the oddest times so as to not make mistakes. If Tiger Woods only knew when to jerk off. It has a true market value, like gold bullion. First of all, I don't jerk off because I'm horny. I'm sort of half-chick. It's like *District 9*. I can fire alien weapons. I can insert a tampon. No, I do it because I want to take a brain bath. It's like a hot whirlpool for my brain, in a brain space that is 100 percent agreeable with itself."

After that, he continues in like manner, revealing another one of his situations. He's in love with the sound of his own voice, always saying things like, "Let me break it down for you," and then laying into it with revelatory verbal fireworks of the kind that constantly threaten to blow him to smithereens. He can't help himself, he's got to say what's on his mind, despite the consequences, which often get played out in the tabloids and on trash TV, such as the time during a stand-up-comedy gig when he said he never got to have sex with early girlfriend Jennifer Love Hewitt because of a bout of food poisoning.

"I sometimes wonder what the fuck I'm doing," he says. "I have these accidents, these mistakes, these self-inflicted wounds, and then I tear my head to shreds about it for days. I'll read a little something and die a thousand times in my own mind, visualizing the death of my career or respect

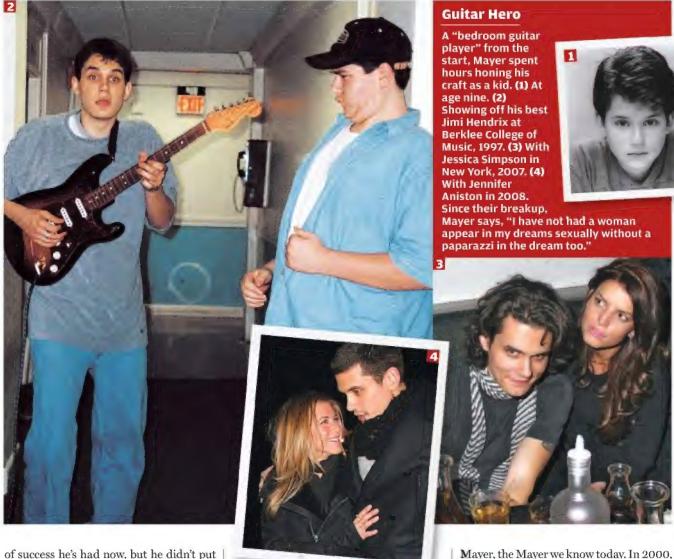
clown in his early years, Mayer had taken up the guitar by his midteens and had begun shutting himself off in his room to the exclusion of everything else. It's all he did and all he wanted to do – "kill it, kill it, kill it," with that guitar. He plastered his room with posters of Stevie Ray Vaughan, B.B. King, Jimi Hendrix. While the other kids were listening to Nirvana, Mayer was deep into reading the Buddy Guy biography Damn Right, I've Got the Blues and cutting out the photos when he was done.

"He kept to himself quite a bit back then, and he was pretty quiet in school but hilarious once we got outside," says Fairfield-raised tennis pro James Blake, who's known Mayer since they were seven. "He seemed pretty disinterested in what was going on in school."

For several years, Mayer took guitar lessons from Al Ferrante, owner of the Fairfield Guitar Center. "He came in holding a Stevie Ray Vaughan album, said, 'I want to learn this stuff,' and in short order he was wailing away," says Ferrante, "way beyond anybody else." To his friends, Mayer's talent was obvious. "He could play the guitar and drum at the same time," recalls Joe Beleznay, who played rhythm guitar in Mayer's high school band, Villanova Junction (named after the Hendrix song). "He'd sit behind the drum set, get the bass drum going, then on the down strum of his guitar he'd hit the snare. It was crazy, inventive shit. He just had it." Says Blake, "With girls, I wouldn't say he had the same kind

malt Lagavulin scotch (and drinks about a bottle of it a week), but only in L.A. In New York, where he owns a home, he doesn't drink that much. It has to do with the hangover. "On the West Coast in the morning, it's like Bob Dylan with a coffee; on the East Coast, it's socialites getting penicillin shots," he says obliquely. "I can't drink in New York."

Along the way, he tries to explain himself and his various predilections. His love of poop Twitters, for instance. "I mean, in the wake of some completely fabricated story in *Star*, you'd be surprised what a good poop joke can do for you. When I send a poop joke out on Twitter, every single time, people write back, 'LOL, that's why I love you. You're not like every other bullshit celebrity.' It shows an artist detaching from the matrix of trying to micromanage per-



in the same kind of effort. His focus was on that guitar." At some point, however, this single-minded devotion to music so freaked his parents out that they sent him to shrinks to see if something was wrong (he was given a clean bill of health). Meanwhile, the kid had his own worries. For one, his parents fought a lot, which he says led him to "disappear and create my own world I could believe in." Also, he'd begun to suffer from anxiety attacks and feared ending up in a mental institution. "Growing up," Mayer says, "that was the big fear." Says his pal Beleznay, "I would get anxiety attacks too, and we would talk each other down. It was heart palpitations, shortness of breath, coldness and shivers, strange stuff, and we'd be like, 'You're totally fine. You're not having a heart attack.' His mind works at such speed that I think he would sort of second-guess his sanity at times."

In his senior year, Mayer decided he was going to skip traditional higher education and become a musician. "I tried to talk him out of it," says Blake, "but then he told me that he didn't care if he was sleeping on a pool table in a dirty bar, he just wanted to play music." When he told his parents the same thing, all hell broke loose. Their re-

action was so strong that even today Mayer wraps himself up in his arms while talking about them and says, "Look at my body language. My goodness."

After graduation, he attended Berklee College of Music in Boston - while there, his father had a change of heart and sent him a note that read, "Remember me when you go platinum" - but Mayer dropped out after a year and moved to Atlanta, to join its thriving singer-songwriter scene. He started off playing Monday's open-mike night upstairs at Eddie's Attic and soon became a regular performer there, as well as a part-time doorman. "He was very talented and extremely determined - as determined as anybody I've ever met," recalls Eddie's Attic founder Eddie Owen. "He thought it was going to happen for him, and by God he did everything he could to make it happen."

Even so, he could still be a shut-in. He had terrible acne and often canceled dates because of it. Eventually, he suffered a kind of breakdown – "an anxiety bender," he once called it – out of which came a new Mayer, the freewheeling social-animal

Mayer, the Mayer we know today. In 2000, a gig at the South by Southwest music festival in Austin led to meetings with several record labels, during which he behaved in typical strong-willed Mayerian fashion.

"As a kid, he picks up a guitar and isolates himself because he's so overtaken by passion for the instrument or because he's not comfortable socially and is an outsider," says Michael McDonald, his manager and friend for the past 10 years. "And then at home, his pursuit isn't supported. But what happened was he became his own biggest advocate. When he went to those meetings, he would tell people how he wanted it to be, and if they offered alternatives, he walked away."

Eventually, Mayer signed with Aware/Columbia. Shortly thereafter, Room for Squares was released, "Your Body Is a Wonderland" became a hit, as did "Daughters," from his second album, Heavier Things, and everyone was happy, especially the label, which was hotly anticipating a third record full of similar radio-ready tunes. Instead, in 2005, Mayer presented it with the cool blues of the John Mayer Trio. Says McDonald, "They were like, 'Oh, fuck, Can we please make it an EP?' But John's got a course charted that he doesn't

share, and the Trio, to him, was an answer to 'Wonderland' and 'Daughters' – not a rebellion against but an answer to."

The Trio's live record, *Try!*, didn't do as well as Mayer's other albums, but that was hardly the point. The point is, he will showcase his talents on his own schedule.

And so forward he moves, on a journey that seems to have gone by with wondrous ease, except, of course, for the acne, and the shut-in business, and the worries about a mental institution, and the anxiety bender – all of which, sum in toto, are probably responsible for the way he is today, this willy-nilly scattered metaminded eccentric who seems next-door normal only on his records. He recently told MTV, "You get kicked in the heart by someone who's aware of it or not, and you get sent alone into a room, and if you have a little bit of intellect, a little bit of talent and a lot of lone-liness, you'll probably make it."

Now that Mayer has left the cloistered seclusion of his room, however, what he seems to want more than anything is to make up for his loneliness by courting mass what it means to be so close to his father at this stage of his dad's life. Nor will he let you talk to his dad, or his mom, or his brothers, like they might reveal some strange truth. In fact, Mayer is cagey about his Fairfield years. He can talk about the most intimate details of his personal life, but about his childhood, and the forces that shaped him, he remains steadfastly mum. But maybe that's the way it should be. Perhaps it's best to rise above the gnawing tabloidlike need to have all mysteries revealed.

Mayer does say that ever since the divorce, he has felt slightly adrift. "I was in L.A., making the record, when it happened. You get orphaned. I never went home. I never went back to the home I grew up in. I never went and saw it again. It happened. My house is gone." Among other things, it's the house where, at the age of 14, he fell in love with the girl who would inspire "Your Body Is a Wonderland" and without whom he would not be where he is today. He recently got an e-mail from her. "It was a beautiful e-mail about what it's like to hear me on the radio," he says. "She

tate, where Mayer seemed to have reverted to some of his childhood ways. "He treated our days together as work," says Clapton, "and I tried to point out to him the importance of music being the truth – and to get him to come out of the bedroom. There are a lot of bedroom guitar players. And John was in and out of that. I wasn't sure if John was aware of the power of playing with other people, though I think he is now." He goes on, "I think he becomes too caught up in being clever. It seems to me his gift happens in spite of him. He's a prime saboteur. And he will do himself in, if everyone lets him. But his gift is in good shape."

And while all of that is very interesting, it's not really what people reading tabloids care about. All they care about is "Who is Mayer going out with now?"

Jessica Simpson was his first big tabloid-heavy romance. They got together in mid-2006 and went public at Christina Aguilera's New Year's Eve party and then they got swarmed. At first Mayer didn't think he could handle all the media heat – "I got so many tension headaches from

## "I'VE NEVER GOTTEN OVER IT," MAYER SAYS OF BREAKING UP WITH JENNIFER ANISTON. "IT WAS ONE OF THE WORST TIMES OF MY LIFE."

attention. It's what his public life is about. It's why he decided to make records like Battle Studies that back-seat his scorching blues guitar in favor of pop-happy lyrics and commercial melodies, the Trio album notwithstanding, and why he even sings songs at all. As far back as 2002, he was saying things like "I scientifically engineer my music to be as accessible as possible," just as today he says, "I love being a famous musician. I love being the center of attention. I believe in judging the quality of a song by how much of a hit it sounds like." At least he's honest. But the ultimate effect is to make Mayer the singer-songwriter and Mayer the man about town sometimes seem disconnected, like they don't even belong in the same body. He says he's going to shake things up on his next record. "I want the next one to be gritty, real gritty," he says. "The no-ballad gritty one." But then he laughs and says, "One ballad." And then he laughs again and says, "I've got a built-in failure attenuator." He gives, he takes away, he's got his course charted, he's a blues killer, he's a pop superstar, he seems so open, he seems so shut, he is a master of disguise.

Last year, his folks finally got divorced, after which Mayer moved his dad, now 82 years old, out to California, to an independent-living facility, where he could see him more often and help take care of him. Mayer won't talk about it, though,

said she smiled. I started crying as I wrote her back. This woman is precious. She can vouch for me not as a celebrity. She carries with her information of this 14-year-old boy she knew. She knows the truth. She hadn't written me in a long time. I think she was trying to forget me because she has a husband and kids." That's one possibility. But there's another possibility: that Mayer is the one who continues to pine, either for her or the idea of her and their shared innocence, his pre-celebrity existence, and he can't bring himself to say so.

VER THE YEARS, LOTS OF musicians have weighed in on Mayer's talents. Said Fall Out Boy's Patrick Stump, "Mayer is single-handedly making the Stratocaster cool again!" Said Buddy Guy, "Every once in a while, a young man comes along to make sure the blues can survive." Said a puzzled Ozzy Osbourne, "Continuum: Music by John Mayer," whoever that is. 'Continuum.' I couldn't understand what that word meant." Said Jason Mraz, after seeing Mayer kill at the Viper Room, "He didn't play no 'Body Is a Wonderland.' He was playing for his love of music. He was Jimi Hendrix and Buddy Guy and Stevie Vaughan all rolled up into one big reincarnation burrito."

In 2006, Mayer spent 10 days working on songs with Eric Clapton at Clapton's esmagazine covers that it felt like a threat" - but stuck it out with her for just shy of a year. Then there's his latest, Jennifer Aniston, and it was the purest kind of celebrity relationship, almost every minute of it documented in one way or another. When it ended, Mayer held an impromptu press conference outside his New York gym in which he planned to flay himself alive for breaking up with Aniston - "I'm the asshole. I burned the American flag. I basically murdered an ideal." Instead, he came off like a jerk only interested in taking credit for the breakup. "I've never really gotten over it," he says. "It was one of the worst times of my life."

He still thinks about Aniston a lot, and in conversation her name pops up often.

"I met a girl one time in Vegas, her name was Dimples, and the 'S' in Dimples was a dollar sign," he's saying early one evening sitting outside at the Chateau Marmont hotel. "I have this weird feeling, a pride thing, for the people I've had relationships with. I still feel like I'm with them, in the sense that if I fucked Dimples, what does that say about someone like Jen? I feel like it's all connected. How could I ever cosmically relate these two people? What would I be saying to Jen, who I think is fucking fantastic, if I said to her, 'I don't dislike you. In fact, I like you extremely well. But I have to back out of this because it doesn't arc over the horizon. This is not [Cont. on 68]





### Ke\$ha's Animal Instincts

E\$HA IS A WILD, WHISKEY-DRINKING white-girl rapper whose debut album, Animal, is packed with real-life stories about "pissing in the Dom Perignon," partying in tranny bars and being hit on by old men. On her Number One hit, "TiK ToK," she sings about boys trying to touch her "junk" and brushing her teeth with Jack Daniel's after an all-night rager. "I just wrote a record about what I live," says Ke\$ha, whose lyrics were inspired by four years of debauchery in L.A. "It was just a lost weekend."

The 22-year-old is already the breakout pop star of 2010 – her hypercatchy electro-pop sound and hedonistic vibe helped *Animal* knock Susan Boyle from the Number One spot in mid-January. "I'm just psyched that I don't have to wait tables anymore, because I hate that with a fiery passion," she says, adding that the "\$" in her name is ironic, because she's never been interested in money. "I was just hoping to become a pop star before the world ends in 2012."

Born Kesha Sebert in L.A. and raised in Nashville, Ke\$ha inherited her wild vibe and artistic spirit from her mom, Pebe, a single parent (she isn't sure who Kesha's dad is) who supported her daughter on welfare checks, food stamps and sporadic royalties from a country tear-jerker she co-wrote called "Old Flames Can't Hold a Candle to You." (It was a hit for Dolly Parton.) "She's the original badass," says Ke\$ha of her mom. "We're like best friends. I'll call her up and say, 'Oh, my God, I gave this guy a blow job last night,' and she'll say, 'Kesha, you slut!'"

For Ke\$ha, being outrageous isn't just an act, it's a philosophy. She spent her Christmas on Mexico's Mayan Peninsula to get back in touch with her inner animal. "I go to the jungle at least once a year to get away from human beings," she says. "Society has taught us to suppress certain things, but if I want to do something, I let the animal inside take over, no matter how uninhibited or irreverent it is. Who cares? Crazy people are what keeps life interesting."

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAN MONICK

# THE SEMI-CHARMED LIFE OF VALUE VALUE America's brainiest, preppiest young band looks like it formed on the ferry to Nantucket – but things aren't always what they seem. By Josh Eells

PHOTOGRAPH BY FRANCESCO CARROZZIN



Koenig was a student at Columbia University, he wrote a short story set at a posh New England prep school. At the time, says Koenig, "I was really obsessed with boarding school as a concept." Middle-class and Jewish, he'd attended public high school in suburban New Jersey and was paying his way through college with a work-study job and "a buttload of student loans." To him, boarding school was a mysterious tradition from another time and tax bracket: "It seemed so . . . fantastical."

One day, in one of his creative-writing seminars, the class went around the room naming topics that interested them. Koenig said boarding school. "Someone was like, 'Oh, did you go to boarding school?" he recalls. "And I realized, 'Oh,

club vibe obscures the fact that songs like "Oxford Comma" and "One (Blake's Got a New Face)" are slyly mocking the affluent twentysomethings that Vampire Weekend are assumed to represent.

They might have been too subtle. Sometimes, the references to Hyannisport and Louis Vuitton fueled the perception that the bandmates themselves are bratty trust-funders. One critic sniffed that their globe-trotting indie pop "emit[ted] the putrescent stench of old money, of old politics, of old-guard high society."

"Sometimes I felt a little bummed," says Koenig. "To me it's very obvious that we're using satire and irony. But some people, when they hear a song called 'Oxford Comma' and that the guys who made it went to Columbia, all they can do is roll their eyes."

Vampire Weekend met eight years ago, as undergraduates at Columbia. Koenig and Batmanglij bonded over Radiohead at a party during freshman year and vowed to start a band one day. They recruited their friend Tomson, a Phish fanatic who played with Koenig in a jokey hip-hop group called L'Homme Run. Baio rounded out the group – the youngest, he was

songs about diplomats' children and skiing in the Alps. Of course, this will only cement the impression that Vampire Weekend are too preppy for rock & roll. "People are going to say our new album sucks too," Baio says. "I'm ready for it."

For all the divisiveness Vampire Weekend have inspired, they remain surprisingly grounded, and almost pathologically polite. Baio shares a modest Brooklyn apartment with the girlfriend he's been with since freshman year; Tomson rents the same room he lived in before getting signed, a laundry-strewn, seven-by-seven-foot shoe box with a framed copy of the Grateful Dead's Workingman's Dead on the wall.

One night we're drinking beer at a homey Brooklyn bar, I'm short \$20, but there's no ATM. "I can lend you some cash if you want," Koenig says.

Batmanglij chimes in: "We can all lend you some."

Baio: "I've got \$10."

Batmanglij: "I have \$13."

Koenig reaches into his pocket and hands over a wrinkled 20. "Here," he says cheerfully. "You can just owe me."

## "To me, it's obvious we're using satire and irony," hear 'Oxford Comma,' a song by guys who went

right! People actually do go to boarding school! It's not like Narnia!'"

Koenig, now 25, is the lead singer and guitarist of Vampire Weekend, and the latest in a line of cultural observers who took an up-close look at wealth and class - and had mixed feelings about what they saw. (See Fitzgerald, F. Scott.) His bandmates, all fellow Columbia grads - bassist Chris Baio, drummer Christopher Tomson and keyboardist-guitarist Rostam Batmanglij - come from relative comfort, the sons of attorneys and white-collar execs who grew up in the cul-de-sacs of Georgetown and Westchester. But for various reasons, they all sit uncomfortably with their social status - like accidental trespassers in the halls of privilege. "My family never had a lot of money," says Koenig. "It's weird to think that I grew up so much better off than my grandparents, or even my parents, but still occasionally feel like a country bumpkin."

On their 2008 debut, Vampire Weekend, Koenig sings about Cape Cod summers and blue-blooded babes, while dressing like Alex P. Keaton at a Young Republicans mixer. But their party-at-the-yacht-

This is Josh Eells' first feature for Rolling Stone. He lives in Brooklyn.

Koenig's suitemate sophomore year, and they shared a love of Destiny's Child.

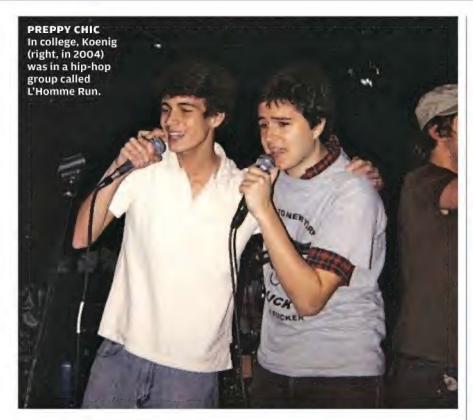
Vampire Weekend played their first show in 2006, at a battle of the bands in a campus basement. They placed third out of four. Later that year, some of their demos appeared online, earning raves from sites like Stereogum and Pitchfork. Before they knew it, they were selling out shows and appearing on the cover of *Spin* without even having released an album. Their debut arrived in January 2008, and by the end of the year they'd performed on *SNL*, played for 40,000 fans at England's Glastonbury festival and sold nearly half a million albums.

The group made its name with tight, buoyant songs that crisscrossed the globe for inspiration, from Puerto Rican reggaeton (Tomson jokes that it's his "signature drumbeat") to accordion music from Madagascar. "Part of it came from working at WKCR," says Tomson, who volunteered at the Columbia student radio station. "There was a great African show, and a really incredible library of stuff you could take and listen to in your room." Their new album, Contra, continues the ethno-pop borrowing – "I think there are points where there's even more explicit African inspiration," Tomson says – and features

N A RAINY TUESDAY AFternoon, Koenig is riding home in a taxi. Cruising through Brooklyn, he spies the building that Jay-Z ID'd as his former stash spot in "Empire State of Mind." Koenig points excitedly: "560 State Street!"

Spend some time with Koenig, and this will happen a lot. Over the next few hours he'll hold forth on a dizzying variety of arcane subjects: reality star Spencer Pratt ("He's a fascinating person, an important cultural figure, and I'm not saying this ironically"); the lyrics of Elvis Costello's "The Loved Ones" ("'Spare us the theatrics and the verbal gymnastics/We break wiseguys just like matchsticks' - those are total rap lyrics!"); the Yiddish word chazerai ("It means 'pig fat,' but you use it to describe 'bullshit'"). Sticking out of his pocket is a paperback copy of Jim Carroll's druggy memoir The Basketball Diaries. Koenig read it in high school, but when Carroll died in September, he decided to revisit it. "I didn't remember how young he was," he says. "He was, like, 13 - fucking girls, doing heroin. It's pretty exciting!"

Koenig lives in Brooklyn's Boerum Hill neighborhood, in a duplex he shares with two roommates. The place is palatial for PREVIOUS SPREAD: STYLING BY CHELSEA GOMBES AND MEGHAN FOLSOM. RAIO'S TRENCH COAT BY BAND OF OUTSIDERS. TOMSON'S JACKET AND SHIRT By Ralph Lauben Collection. Koenig's Shirt by Stevem alan, Jacket by Ralph Lauben Collection



## says Koenig. "But when people to Columbia, they roll their eyes."

post-collegiate New York, but by rockstar standards it's kind of a fixer-upper. A creaky staircase leads down to Koenig's messy room, and the upstairs shelves are crammed with books: Beckett, Nabokov and his favorite, Evelyn Waugh. (For Halloween one year he dressed up as Sebastian, the drunken aristocrat from *Brides-head Revisited*. Everyone thought he was a cricket player.)

Koenig kicks off his duck boots and plops down on the couch. He's tall and patricianlooking, with the expressive features of a 1920s film star. A fifth-generation New Yorker, he was born on Manhattan's Upper West Side when it was still the boho-liberal enclave of Nora Ephron books and Annie Hall. His parents lived there in what he calls "post-hippie domesticity" - Fela Kuti on the stereo, Moosewood Cookbook in the kitchen. His family-therapist mom studied Buddhism and taught yoga, and his dad was a photographer's assistant and movie-set dresser (he worked on Malcolm X and Requiem for a Dream) who dabbled in guitar. Once, when Ezra's mom was pregnant, someone asked his father what he wanted for his son. His answer: "I hope he has a nice girlfriend and a band."

When Ezra was two, his family moved to the Jersey suburbs, to a town called Glen Ridge. He was one of the only Jewish kids at his school, a fact that caused him no shortage of angst. (Koenig still remembers throwing a fit in first grade when his teacher made the class color pictures of the Easter Bunny.) When it came time for his bar mitzvah, 13-year-old Ezra was too embarrassed to invite any of his friends. "Fine, we can have a party," he told his parents. "You can invite, like, Grandma."

In high school, Koenig turned these feelings of alienation into an aesthetic. "I used to think Polo was really lame," he says. But when he discovered that Ralph Lauren was born Ralph Lifshitz, the son of a Russian-immigrant house painter in the North Bronx, those tee-time-at-the-country-club get-ups suddenly felt kind of subversive. He bought his first Polo shirt at a Congregational Church rummage sale, and soon he was rocking so much Lacoste that a teacher told him he looked "like the bad guy from a John Hughes movie."

Koenig's Hamptons-chic vibe went on to become a key part of the VW brand; rarely does a write-up fail to mention their cardigans or boat shoes. But to Koenig, it's about more than just a look. "I'm hesitant to talk about it, because then it seems like Vampire Weekend is this big conceptual project," he says. "But around the time the band started, I became very interested in the connection between preppy American fashion and Victorian imperialism. For instance: Where does the word 'khaki' come from? It's Urdu. Where does 'seersucker' come from? Hindi-slash-Persian. Madras prints? They're from India. Blazers? They were a British naval uniform." (Koenig, who taught English at a Brooklyn middle school, has a tendency to switch into lecture mode.)

"Now obviously that was a very fuckedup time period," he continues. "But there's something exciting about realizing that these clothes that have come to represent WASPy Americans, the pinnacle of whiteness, actually have their roots in India or the non-Western world. They have this fascinating history flowing through them. Preppiness is this wide-open thing."

This kind of geocultural dot-connecting could be Vampire Weekend's mission statement. Their first album cherry-picked styles from all over the globe: Congolese soukous, Ghanaian highlife, Jamaican ska, Dominican bachata. It was like a souvenir mixtape from the coolest study-abroad semester ever – a lively, off-kilter sound they dubbed "Upper West Side Soweto." ("Which I regret," Koenig says.)

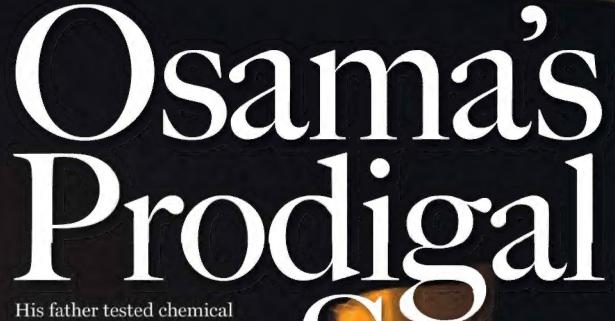
To some, the band members were indierock colonialists, plundering Third World styles for their own gain. But for Koenig, who studied the semiotics of post-colonial literature, concepts like purism and authenticity are as outdated as a land line. Everything is intertwined, he says, and "polar opposites don't exist." Start seeing the connections, and "the idea of fusion – of mixing things – seems less and less like a novelty, and more just the way the world works."

F KOENIG IS VAMPIRE WEEKEND'S analytical left brain, Batmanglij is its abstract, artistic right. On a November morning, he answers the door to his apartment in jeans and a light-blue oxford with paisley patches on the elbows. In his living room, a knockoff Verner Panton chair sits in front of a small upright piano, and Japanese subway maps adorn the walls. Batmanglij just got home from the gym, and he's feeling a little lightheaded. "Do you want something to drink?" he asks as he fills a wineglass with water. Meeting him is like visiting your very sweet, very attentive grandmother: Can I get you anything to eat? I'm going to have some water, would you like some water? Do you want a banana?

Batmanglij grew up in Washington, D.C., the son of Persian immigrants who fled Iran shortly before the 1979 revolution. Now his parents own a small publishing house whose motto is "Bridging East and West." His mom's Persian cookbooks are their biggest sellers.

A creative kid with an inquisitive streak, Batmanglij learned to play [Cont. on 68]





His father tested chemical weapons on his dogs, tried to turn him into a suicide bomber and groomed him to lead Al Qaeda. The dark, twisted journey of Omar bin Laden

By Guy Lawson

THE DEFECTOR
Omar bin Laden in a cafe
in Beirut. "I could face
reprisals for talking," he
says. "But my father
would never harm me."

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midnight when Osama bin Laden's fourthborn son, Omar, leads me into a nightclub called Les Caves de Boys in the center of Damascus. Marked only by a small neon sign on a side street in an upscale quarter of the city, the basement bar is dark and secluded, enveloped by an air of exclusivity. Omar brushes past the two heavyset Syrian thugs at the door and picks a booth in the back. A dozen or so wealthy Arab men are drinking whiskey and watching Russian strippers put on a show. By Western standards, the performances are tame, a succession of scantily clad women in burlesque costumes - Little Bo Peep, pigtailed schoolgirl, pole-climbing gymnast. But as Omar sips a 7 Up, he follows their every move with boyish wonder. Russian women, he tells me, are the Omar smiles. It's a knowing and ironic look, the age of terrorism turned into a cosmic joke: Can you believe how fucked up things are?

Past two in the morning, a statuesque dancer emerges for the grand finale. Dressed in a red rhinestone bra and panties, with a black shimmy belt and an ostrich-feather crown, she gyrates her hips as Omar watches, mesmerized.

"Thank God my father doesn't run the world," Omar says, grinning.

THERE IS NO MORE REVEALING VIEW of a man than through the eyes of a son he has wronged. To Omar, Osama bin Laden is neither a freedom-fighting jihadist nor a terrifying mass murderer – he is a lost man, a flawed and fanatical father who withheld his love, beat and betrayed his own children, and destroyed his family chasing his fantasy of becoming a latter-day prophet. "My father is a strong personality," says Omar. "Nobody can stop him from getting his dream. Either he gets what he wants, or he dies."

Now 28, Omar is one of 11 sons of Osama bin Laden. But from an early age, Omar stood out from his brothers for his independence. Though Omar does not believe that any of his siblings are still by his faneatly trimmed. He is dressed in black – leather jacket, Versace T-shirt, designer jeans – and, in perhaps the final insult to the aesthetics of jihad, shiny silver sneakers. With the finishing touch of dark sunglasses, the *Matrix*-like outfit gives Omar the appearance of a celebrity trying to deflect notice – at the same time as he attracts attention with a flamboyant disguise.

"People recognize me a lot of times in Saudi Arabia," he says. "They say I should be proud of my father. There are millions who agree with my father. By many people, he is respected, idolized. I could face reprisals because you can't speak against your father in the Muslim world. Many people say I should not talk. But my father would never harm me."

Sitting next to Omar drinking a virgin piña colada is his wife, Zaina, a British grandmother nearly twice his age. Short, light-skinned, with striking blue eyes, she wears an ankle-length black coat that looks like a costume from *The Lord of the Rings*. Zaina acts as Omar's conduit to the Western world, serving as his publicist, dresser and interpreter, hovering over his every word and rushing to deflect anything she considers damaging or inflammatory. Since they met four years ago, the unlikely couple have become tabloid

## Omar doubts his father will stage more attacks. "He doesn't need to. As soon as America went to Afghanistan, his plan worked. He's already won."

most beautiful in the world. "It is as if their bodies are shaped with plastic, like dolls," he says.

As a teenager in the mountains of Tora Bora, Omar had been his father's chosen successor, the favored son meant to lead Al Qaeda and carry on global jihad. Then, in 2001, a few months before Osama bin Laden was to become the world's most wanted man, Omar abandoned his father's compound in Afghanistan. He left behind almost certain death for this: the world, Les Caves de Boys, life.

Now, as a dancer joins a drunken man in the booth next to us, Omar reflects on his own connection to the strippers onstage. "I have talked to these women before," he says. "I tell them my name. Sometimes they don't believe I am a bin Laden. Sometimes they get mad. They have to dance like this because their country is poor. It was my father who made Russia poor, in the war in Afghanistan. He ruined their economy. He is doing the same thing to America right now."

Contributing editor Guy Lawson wrote about the Mexican drug war in RS 1074. ther's side, he is the only bin Laden son to publicly disavow his father's violence. In Growing Up bin Laden, co-authored last year with his mother and an American writer named Jean Sasson, Omar not only captures the insanity and cruelty inside his father's world, but also provides an intimate portrait of what it is like to be the son of a sociopath. "In many ways, Omar's story represents how the modern Arab world is thinking through its views of the West," observes Steve Coll, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of The Bin Ladens and president of the New America Foundation. "They accept the critique provided by Al Qaeda but not its idea of never-ending war. Like Omar, they won't follow Osama onto the battlefield."

Omar bears a striking resemblance to his father: He has the long, broad nose, the pronounced brow, the dark, brooding eyes. Sitting in the hotel bistro at the Four Seasons in Damascus the morning after our visit to Les Caves, Omar attracts sly glances from the bellhops and waitresses. Shorter and more muscular than his father, he wears his jet-black hair rock-star long and pulled back in a ponytail, his goatee

fodder in England. "We are bigger than Prince Charles and Lady Diana," Omar says, shaking his head. He made headlines for a few days in 2008 when he went on television and declared that his father should "find another way" – an appearance designed to promote a horse race he had proposed from Cairo to Morocco, an event Omar said would help promote world peace. He had lofty goals for himself: He hoped to become a goodwill ambassador for the United Nations, like Audrey Hepburn or Angelina Jolie.

It didn't help that Zaina struck many in the British press as an attention-hungry harpy, a scheming wanna-be who was using Omar and his infamous father as a chance to become rich and famous. "To anyone who wants to give me £10 million, I will give my full life story," she told the London Daily Mail. "My story is worth it because I am married to the son of Osama bin Laden." No one took up the offer, but the details of her colorful past soon made the papers: her five previous marriages, including one to a Hells Angel, her adoption of the title "Lady," the spiderweb tattoo across her back.



#### **The Chosen One**

Omar bin Laden at age six, the year he started school in Saudi Arabia (1) and with his siblings (third from left) in the family's sitting room in Jeddah (2). For much of his early childhood his father was fighting the Russians in Afghanistan (3), where he took Omar at age 15. "I was my father's favorite," Omar recalls. "He had a lot of hope that I'd do something for the world. But I wanted to be a normal boy."

"They made me sound crazy," Zaina complains. "They said that Omar had run away with a grandmother with thousands of pounds worth of plastic surgery. I have no scars from plastic surgery. They made it up. They lied about us."

Like his father, Omar is a man in search of a country. A citizen of Saudi Arabia, where he has primarily lived since he left his father, he has been denied a visa by England and turned down for political asylum by Egypt and Spain. After months of back-and-forth negotiations, he finally agreed

to meet me in Syria, where he was going to visit his mother, Najwa, Osama bin Laden's first wife. We would spend four days together, first in Damascus and then on a drive through the Bekaa Valley into Beirut, a city that Omar wanted to see but had never visited.

The night before, in the strip club, Omar had been relaxed. But when I turn on my tape recorder in the Four Seasons bistro, he lapses into awkward silence. When I ask about his father, he is defensive and evasive. "I love him because he is my father," he says. "I don't want him to be caught and put on trial. It would break my heart. I wish he could die before someone gets him. I don't want to see my father under the rule of somebody else. My father is my father, to this day, and until I die. I came from his body. I am part of him."

"How do you feel when you see him on television?" I ask.



"I get worried," Omar says. "For me, for my father, for the world."

After a long silence, Omar turns on his smartphone and shows me the logo for a company he and Zaina are starting called B41. The company's first project, he says, will be a line of high-fashion clothes. "It will be like Armani but with a different style," Zaina explains. "It will be a mixture between East and West, silk and quality fabrics, a semiconservative mix and match." The notion of the bin Laden name being re-branded as the pinnacle of luxury may seem risible, but Zaina has grandiose plans for B41. She says she is going to design horseback-riding equipment show bridles and shawls - followed by another book, centered on her and Omar's experiences after 9/11. This interview, it becomes clear, is part of an overall business strategy: Omar and Zaina hope that an investor will read about their venture and put large sums of money into B41.

Since returning to Saudi Arabia shortly before the attacks of 2001, Omar has struggled to make a living, an injustice that cuts him to the quick. He had assumed that he would slide effortlessly into the life of private jets and luxurious homes enjoyed by his wealthy Saudi relatives, but instead, he was forced to work for the family as a real estate agent, on commission. "Saudi fami-

lies are afraid to be around me," he says. "That was why I couldn't marry one of my cousins or a Saudi girl from my class. I got refused seven times, from people at the same level as my family." He managed to amass several hundred thousand dollars by starting a scrap-metal business, but for a bin Laden accustomed to vast wealth, such a sum was a pittance. Haunted by his father's misdeeds and unable to make a name for himself, he plunged into a deep depression.

Then, on a horseback-riding tour near the Pyramids in 2006, he met Zaina. "I see her blue eyes and the black hair, and in my heart I wanted to marry her," he says. "She was in the same group of horse riders as me. It was a sign I could make my dream. The second day, we were walking down from the Pyramids, and I told her who I am. A lot of time people run away. She told me she knew who I was. She didn't go away

"Before Omar, I had a very quiet life," Zaina says. "I preferred to ride horses. I liked to be left alone. Then the awful things came out in the newspapers, and I was mortified. Everybody believed these horrific things about Omar and about me. They think he is just like his father."

"I am judged by my father all the time," Omar says. "It is not right. I am trying to fight all the world to think differently than they do about me. It is very, very, very hard work."

S A COMING-OF-AGE STORY, Omar's childhood surely ranks as one of the strangest on record. When Omar was a child growing up in Saudi

Arabia, his father was off in Afghanistan fighting the Soviets. "In those days, my father was a great hero to the West, too," Omar observes. But the years of war, and the deprivations he suffered in Afghanistan, had turned Osama's views bleak and Spartan. "Life has to be a burden," Osama advised his sons. "Life has to be hard. You will be made stronger if you are treated toughly. You will become capable adults, able to endure many hardships."

While his cousins enjoyed the luxury and comfort afforded to one of the wealthiest and most powerful families in Saudi Arabia, Omar and his brothers were forced to live as though it were the seventh century: no movies, no television, no indecent music. His father's hatred for the "evils of modern

life" meant no fizzy drinks, no toys, no inhaler for Omar's asthma. If Omar needed relief, his father told his desperate son, he could breathe through a honeycomb.

"We were told that we must not become excited at any situation," Omar recalls in his memoir. "We were not allowed to tell jokes. We were ordered not to express joy over anything. He did say that he would allow us to smile so long as we did not laugh. If we were to lose control of our emotions and bark a laugh, we must be careful not to expose our eyeteeth. I have been in situations where my father actually counted the exposed teeth, reprimanding his sons on the number their merriment had revealed."

Today, Omar prides himself on his ability to show his teeth when he laughs. His sense of humor, such as it is, tends to run to the dark side: At one point, he offers up a "funny story" about a slutty female dog that ends with her jealous mate tearing apart his rivals. With any luck, Omar

hopes to write comedy one day. "Why not?" he asks. "I love Jim Carrey. He is brilliant man. Comedy for me is about adult with children mentality, and children with adult mentality. Jim Carrey is adult, but he doesn't take it seriously. He doesn't have to be respectable man."

Although Omar comes from a society that has no truck with modern psychology, he is able to see that his development was profoundly impacted by the way he was denied nurture as a child. "While it is difficult for any human being to accurately describe their own personality," he says in his memoir, "I know enough of myself to be convinced that the life my father decreed for his sons also shaped me negatively." But the harsh upbringing didn't destroy Omar's need for his father's affection. "Of all my children," his mother says in the book, "Omar felt the keenest long-



MRS. BIN LADEN Omar and Zaina in Beirut. "Why would she want to be with me if her heart is not clean and right?" he says.

ing for a father's love."

In 1992, when Omar was 10, Osama moved his family to a jihadist compound in Sudan. Isolated and impoverished, Omar grew desperate to connect with the outside world. Forbidden to watch movies or television, he improvised. When Omar caught the bus to school in Khartoum, he had one of his friends recite entire scenes from *Rambo* line by line while he imagined what the onscreen action might look like.

"Tell him the story about meeting Sylvester Stallone," Zaina says.

"I met Rambo in Rome," Omar says with a smile. He had traveled to the city with Zaina in 2008, to appear on an Italian television show.

"He lied about us," Zaina says.

"Until I met him, he was one of my heroes. I thought he would be a friendly man. But he doesn't care about anyone around."

"We were staying at one of the best hotels in Rome," Zaina says. "The owner asked if I would like to meet him. I said sure, just to say hello. But he wouldn't look at me. He wouldn't answer when I tried to introduce myself. The owner of the hotel was embarrassed. Later, in a British newspaper, he said that I was son of Hitler."

"He said he was disgusted to be in the same room with bin Laden," Zaina says. "It was unbelievable."

Events in Omar's childhood weren't marked by birthdays or family vacations – they were punctuated by embassy bombings and missile attacks and nights sleeping in the desert to prepare for Armageddon. Omar befriended the teenage sons of the men then plotting the first World Trade Center bombing, as well as the bombings of the American Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Even so, he recalls the time with fondness, relatively speak-

ing. He and his brothers were sent to the best school in the country, until a bullet whistled through a window one day and the compound was besieged by gunmen attempting to assassinate his father. The attack only deepened bin Laden's commitment to jihad, as well as his paranoia and anger. When Omar's pet monkey was deliberately run over by one of Osama's men, Omar discovered his father had convinced the man that the animal was a Jewish human turned into a monkey "by the hand of God."

"In the eyes of this stupid man, he had killed a Jew!" Omar says in amazement.

In what Omar calls his father's "mad world," there was no way to know where peril lay. One day, one of Omar's closest friends was raped by a group of

men. "The rapists added insult to the attack and injury by snapping photographs of the young man during and after the rape," Omar recounts in his memoir. When the photographs fell into the possession of Ayman Muhammad al-Zawahri, his father's top deputy, it was the equivalent of a death sentence. Zawahri – who in Omar's eyes was little more than a psychopath – concluded that the boy was homosexual. Despite pleadings from the boy's father, Omar's friend was dragged into a room with Zawahri, who shot him in the head.

Omar says that the form of Islam he practices today is "moderate," but his childhood experience clearly helped shape his religious beliefs. Walking with Zaina through the crowded market in Damascus, Omar comes to the stern facade of the Umayyad Mosque, one of the holiest places in Islam. He points to an ornate minaret. This, he says, was the place where the Prophet declared that Christ would return to Earth. "When Christ comes down,

God will say to the Christians there is no more Christianity," Omar says. "Christians will become Muslims."

Zaina quickly cuts him off. "He doesn't mean that literally," she interjects, trying to moderate Omar's vision of how history will unfold. "It's a question of interpretation of the Koran."

But Omar will not have his views softened. "I believe this 100 percent," he insists. "It is fact. To be a Muslim, you have to believe, because it is what the Prophet said."

began to bridle against the severe way of life imposed by his father. He was a headstrong kid, with an independent streak that Osama proudly said gave him the qualities of a judge – a high compliment in Islam. Omar was given the nickname Alfarook, Arabic for "sword."

In 1996, under increasing pressure from the United States, the Sudanese government ordered bin Laden to leave Khartoum. Omar was the only son Osama took

Osama was ecstatic in Tora Bora. The "sheik," as his men called him, began to act as if he were the Prophet himself. "My father was always a source of awed conversation," Omar recalls. "His men were so overcome by his presence that they believed every little thing was a sign from God." But while his followers treated bin Laden as the modern incarnation of Muhammad, Omar saw a father disappearing into a world of extremist make-believe. Like the son of a Civil War re-enactor who has taken his hobby to absurd lengths, Omar was miserable, a seriously pissedoff teenager made to endure his dad's lunacy on a never-ending camping trip to relive the bloody battles of the past.

At Tora Bora, he became his father's personal tea boy, bathing Osama's feet before prayers each day. His father often listened to the BBC on a transistor radio, shouting into a Dictaphone about the evils of America. "After a week or so of hearing his tirades, I shut my ears to his unpleasant rants, but now I regret my inattention," Omar recalls. "Many times I wish I had

- the ones who fought the Russians," he says. "The old people were calm and friendly. They had finished fighting. They couldn't go home because their old country wouldn't take them. They were stuck." But that same respect didn't extend to Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and the Al Qaeda recruits who were flocking to the mountains of Afghanistan, eager to wage war on America. To Omar, the newcomers were buffoons and bores. He dismisses their Afghan pilgrimages as "jihad vacation," his father's grand scheme as nothing but a suicide camp for wayward Muslims.

"Most of the new ones who came to my father were just silly soldiers," he says. "Some were running away from problems in their lives. Some could not live a normal life. I didn't do the training like the others. I have no use for this. All the running and jumping were silly." In Omar's telling, grenade pins were pulled accidentally, explosives were mishandled and jihadists regularly killed each other in friendly-fire incidents.

One of the most highly publicized items

## To Omar, his father's followers were buffoons and bores. "These men are all Mini Me's," he says. "They want to be just like my father."

with him when he returned to Afghanistan. "No one could control me," Omar recalls. "That is why my father was always taking me with him. I was his chosen son. I was my father's favorite. He said that to me. He said he had a lot of hope that I would do something for the world. I didn't want this. I wanted to be a normal boy. I wish it didn't happen. God puts responsibility on the leaders of the world. He doesn't put responsibility on me."

In May 1996, after taking a private jet to Jalalabad, father and son arrived in a nation immersed in civil war and still reeling from the decade-long campaign against the Soviets. They were immediately welcomed by tribal leaders, who gave bin Laden a mountain called Tora Bora as a gift. Taken to the remote redoubt, little more than a collection of abandoned shacks, 15-yearold Omar's heart sank. He had hoped for a house, electricity, maybe a few creature comforts. His cousins in Jeddah had Jet Skis and weekend trips to London and Beirut; they had whiskey, women, freedom. "I really could not believe that our lives had come to this," Omar recalls in his memoir. "Here I was, the son of a wealthy bin Laden, living in a lawless land, wheezing for air in a small Toyota truck, surrounded by Afghan warriors carrying powerful weapons, on my way to help my father claim a mountain hut for our family home."

those tapes in hand so that I could better understand what it was that drove my father to hate so many governments and so many innocent people."

Alone with his son, Osama also shared stories of his own childhood. The elder bin Laden said he had been abandoned by his father and spoke of the pain he suffered when his father beat him – just as he beat Omar and his brothers. "I was puzzled," Omar says in his memoir. "If after so many years he could recall how pained he was when his father struck him or ignored him, I could not understand how he could so easily, even eagerly, beat or ignore his own sons. I never got the courage to ask my father that question, although I am sorry now that my nerve failed me."

Living in a remote mountain hide-out with a father bent on world domination, Omar's existence was like some twisted, real-life version of Dr. Evil's son from the *Austin Powers* films. Omar laughs at the comparison. There is a good resemblance, he admits. But to Omar, what *Austin Powers* really got right was the relationship between his father and his father's followers. "These men are all Mini Me's," he says. "They want to be just like my father – to look like him, to act like him, to be him."

Living in the camp at Tora Bora, Omar grew to admire the veterans of the war against the Soviets. "I loved the old guys seized from bin Laden's hide-out after the U.S. invasion in 2001 was a cache of videotapes that showed puppies being put into pens and slowly, painfully killed to test chemical weapons. To the world, the tapes proved the diabolical ambitions of bin Laden and his followers. To Omar, it was just another example of a cruel and inconsiderate father. The puppies had been born to Omar's favorite dog, and he had hoped to raise the entire brood. But Osama's men kept taking the puppies for their experiments.

In his memoir, Omar says he wept when he learned that his puppies had been killed. But when I ask him about the incident, he stops short of blaming his father. The Arab stricture against speaking ill of one's parents is too hard to defy. "To this day, we don't know who gave the order," Omar insists. "Better they have my dogs than someone else's."

In Afghanistan, Omar was taught to fire a Kalashnikov and learned to drive a Russian tank. But for the most part, he found life in the mountains unbearably tedious. For days on end, he would be stuck in the camp's mosque listening to speech after speech. "Once they start, you can't leave when a man is talking," he says. "You can't make him angry or embarrassed by leaving. They talk about Islam, about what the Prophet said, basic re- [Cont. on 69]

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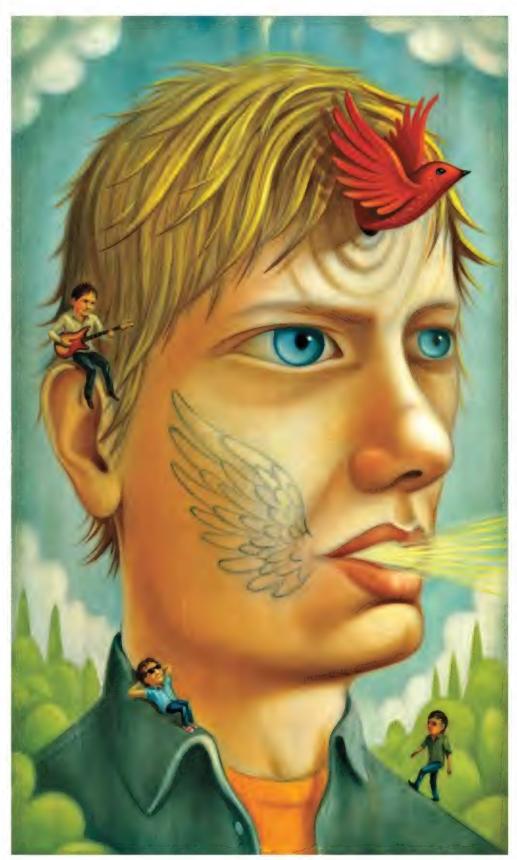
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NEW CDS Pg. 6
SINGLESPg. 6
MOVIES Pg. 6
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## Longtime indie heroes reveal classic-rock soul on seventh album

#### Spoon \*\*\*\*1/2

Transference Merge

BY DAVID FRICKE



spoon are a quartet from Austin with roots in what now seems like a

distant golden era: the early-Nineties zenith of alternative rock. In 1993, the year singerguitarist-songwriter Britt Daniel and drummer Jim Eno founded the group, Nirvana were still a working band, Beck was hot with "Loser" and Smashing Pumpkins were in the Top 10 with Siamese Dream. Daniel, Eno, keyboard player Eric Harvey and bassist Rob Pope are now in a mainstream of their own. Their records don't go platinum or anywhere near Top 40 radio, but albums such as 2002's Kill the Moonlight and 2005's Gimme Fiction are routinely plundered for film scores and TV shows. With that exposure, hardy touring and the loyalty of indie-rock fans, Spoon are big enough to be in the Top 10 themselves - 2007's Ga Ga Ga Ga Ga debuted there - and headline rooms as big as New York's Radio City Music Hall.

Transference is Spoon's seventh album and, at times, sounds like their best: the jaunty drive of "The Mystery Zone"; the rough sugar of "Written in Reverse," with its barroom-rock charge and oooweee vocal frosting. The honor for overall excellence still goes to Ga Ga Ga Ga Ga for its wily integration of punk-club bang and acid-flecked Britpop invention. Transference does not seem as consistent

- yet. It can take a while for the always-shifting balance of smart, weird and wild in Daniel's writing and the band's bony attack to sink in and stay there. For now, "Who Makes Your Money" comes off as cold, sketchy funk, and "Out Go the Lights," a slight piece of New Wave melodrama and dub-reggae reverb, strives for hypnotic desire but just feels overlong.

But the bulk of Transference is a provocative blast, a union of Daniel's art-pop ambitions and his band's totalpop strengths. "Got Nuffin" is dirty, jarring buoyancy, with sharp chord changes and singalong gusto. "Before Destruction," which opens this album, is softer and even bolder. It sounds at first like Daniel built the song with spare parts from old Badfinger and Radiohead records. He pits his worried tenor - "I want to believe/For once to believe now" - against the sullen hiss of a high-hat cymbal, a grim pair of droning keyboards and an icy wall of choral harmonies. But the cumulative effect is a dark delight - stark and fearful but attractively strange and melodically compelling.

Spoon may have started out as a young Texas Pixies, but they are, deep down, classicists, closer in their rugged idiosyncrasy and pop-tune guile to the raw-rock searching and hooks on the early John Lennon and Paul McCartney solo recordings. "Written in Reverse" recalls the clatter and swagger of McCartney's first garage-band version of Wings. And "I Saw the Light" starts like a rude son of "I Found Out" on 1970's John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band - hammering strum and drums, with Daniel crowing, "I felt so permanently alive."

That's a rare burst of straight talk – Daniel favors more abstract wordplay in his confession and contention. But more often than not, Spoon make direct, vigorous sense on *Transference*. "And I go out in the world," Daniel sings at one point in "I Saw the Light," "I make my case to the world" – a good description of his 17 years in this band and its still-striving spirit.

**Key Tracks:** "The Mystery Zone," "Written in Reverse"

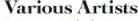
#### Lil Wayne's Lost Winter

Wayne pushes out two place-holders before he heads to jail for a year

#### Lil Wayne











"REBIRTH" SOUNDS LIKE THE FIRST ALBUM THAT didn't come easily for Lil Wayne: He started working on it two years ago – an eternity for a guy who tosses off tracks in his hotel room between shows. If you have an Internet connection, you know that it's his rock & roll record – not such a crazy idea for this leather-clad Martian with serious rock-star appeal. The problem is that Wayne has very questionable taste in rock. He splutters and wails over tracks stuffed with aggro stomp and bland riffage; it sounds like he's been holing up with a bunch of Spymob and Incubus records. Wayne growls like an Auto-Tuned Kid Rock on

the swaggering "American Star." But the hyperclever Wayne we know is missing in action on the anguished chest-thumper "Runnin'." He stretches his croak past the breaking point on "I'll Die for You,"

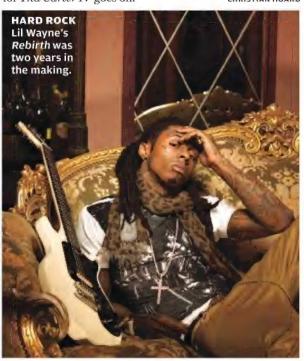
World," "American Star"

**Key Tracks:** 

"Drop the

like some 21st-century version of *Trans*-era Neil Young: a vocally challenged genius stuck in limbo.

Wayne is back in hip-hop mode on We Are Young Money, although he's mostly limited to the choruses on this showcase for his new label. It's inconsistent, veering from Drake (always solid, but distracted here) to very average MCs like Gudda Gudda. One bright spot is sassy newcomer Nicki Minaj, who makes a pork-free lifestyle sound badass on "Roger That": "Asalaam alaikum, no oink for me/And I never let a D-boy boink for free." Aside from that, the wait for Tha Carter IV goes on.



#### Nick Jonas and the Administration

 $\star\star\star$ 

Who I Am Hollywood

Jonas Brother plunges alone into world of heartbreak



IF YOU HAPPEN to be a young Bro of the Jo persuasion, it's understood that you

sing about girls breaking your heart, just because that's what pop stars do. But even so, it's odd how Nick Jonas keeps singing about treacherous ladies. ("She'll charge you by the hour/ For a straight trip down to hell" - jinkies!) Doesn't he meet any nice girls? In this side project, he's not trying to be too different from the Bros, just going for a more retro-soul vibe with a band of old Prince alumni powering nuggets like the ace Stevie Wonder hommage "State of Emergency." And the gothpiano dirge "Vesper's Goodbye" deserves to be on the next Twilight soundtrack. ROB SHEFFIELD

Key Tracks: "State of Emergency," "Vesper's Goodbye"

#### Charlotte Gainsbourg

\*\*\*1/2

IRM Because Music/Elektra Not your average indieactress-makes-album affair



ACTRESS CHARlotte Gainsbourg may be the daughter of the ultimate Euro-

glam couple, Serge Gainsbourg and Jane Birkin, but her Beck collaboration, IRM, is a toughminded trip through some serious adult trauma: the 2007 cerebral hemorrhage that nearly killed her. Beck's keyboards echo the sound of an emergency-room brain scan. "IRM" is a stark hospital scene ("Following the X-ray eyes/ From the cortex to the medulla"), and "Dandelion" explores melancholy with some French wit. As Gainsbourg sings, "Dumb luck is the only luck I ever knew."

Key Tracks: "IRM," "Dandelion"

### TOP SINGLES

#### Dirty Projectors \*\*\*

#### "Ascending Melody"

dirtyprojectors.net Not made for dancing in high heels: The A side of this seven-inch single (and MP3 giveaway) has a nice lift, albeit with the Projectors' hiccuping, oddball swing. A swarm of dry guitar picking and seesawing girl harmonies gets hijacked midway by leader Dave Longstreth "That's good, OK, here we go!" - who wigs the groove out even further.

WILL HERMES

#### Gucci Mane

\*\*\*\*<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>

"My Shadow (Salem Remix)" maddecent.com

Producer Diplo is the host of the new Free Gucci mixtape - an off-kilter collection of Southern-rap remixes - but the highlight comes from spooky trio Salem, who drop Gucci's rough flow over a moody Blade Runner-ish synth line: Imagine stripclub music for androids.

NATHAN BRACKETT

#### Jónsi \*\*\*

Boy Lilikoi jonsi.com

The first taste of the Sigur Rós singer's solo debut is less glacial than his band's work but no less epic, with digitally tweaked orchestral arrangements by pop-classical It boy Nico Muhly churning behind a new approach: English lyrics. Something about humans acting like animals - though dude sounds more like an angel here.

#### "Soldier of Love"

All major services

Twenty-five years after Diamond Life, Nigerian expat Helen Folasade Adu posts a banging status update, her Nina Simone low register billowing over martial snares, dark strings and ghostly guitar bursts: "I've lost the use of my heart/But I'm still alive." Note to interested remix rappers: The line is around the block.



#### A Gift From the Guitar Gods: Unheard Hendrix

Jimi Hendrix \*\*\* "Valleys of Neptune" Legacy

"Lord, I feel the ocean swaying me/ Washing away all my pain," Jimi Hendrix sings at the start of this magnificent discovery. The title track of a new album of previously unreleased Hendrix studio recordings, "Valleys of Neptune" was important to the guitarist, a heavy-rock hymn to rebirth that he worked on at multiple sessions starting in February 1969, yet never finished, at least to his satisfaction, before his death. But this version is perfection, cut on May 15th, 1970, with drummer Mitch Mitchell of the Jimi Hendrix Experience and bassist Billy Cox. (Hendrix used a lead vocal and percussion from an earlier date.) It opens with a gorgeous swirl of guitar atop Mitchell's dancing cymbals, and Hendrix's animated rhythm work is like a second counterpoint vocal, while his instrumental bridge is a dramatic upward surge of liquid treble and slicing sword-blade chords. Hendrix died four months later. He sounds here like he was never more alive. DAVID FRICKE

#### M.I.A.'s Deep-Space Return

M.I.A.  $\star\star\star^{1/2}$ 

"Space Odyssey"

 $twitter.com/_m_i_a_$ 

Head-trip alert. M.I.A.'s new song, recorded in a day with producer Rusko and released on Twitter, forsakes her usual dance-floor-rattling clangor for dreamy psychedelia. Over a swirling midtempo beat, broken occasionally by the howl of an air-raid siren, M.I.A. chants a simple nine-note melody. The lyrics are a stoner's play-by-play. "Gravity's my enemy....I'm floating in the light-golden sea." The video recorded on a webcam - is just as bare-bones and mesmerizing; get high like planes, indeed. JODY ROSEN

#### Jack White's Latest Flame

#### Wanda Jackson

\*\*\*1/2

"You Know I'm No Good"

Gentlemanly roots acolyte Jack White gives 72-year-old rockabilly queen Wanda Jackson the retro-modern treatment he gave Loretta Lynn on Van Lear Rose. The song, Amy Winehouse's self-loathing soul jam, is an inspired choice, although the vocal effects - think Fifties-style Auto-Tune - are a bit distancing. Still, the old girl's growls are nasty, the surf-guitar lines chilling and the New Orleans brass outro wicked. When's the album?

#### **BOOTLEG**

#### Guns n' Roses

Tokyo Dome December 19th, 2009

Axl Rose has been known to storm offstage after a few songs at Guns n' Roses gigs - or not show up at all. That wasn't the problem at the final stop of G n' R's brief December Asian tour, which clocked in at a career-high three hours and 40 minutes. In addition to playing most of Appetite for Destruction and all but one song of 2008's Chinese Democracy, the band played a dozen covers ranging from David Bowie's "Ziggy Stardust" to AC/DC's "Whole Lotta Rosie" to more familiar G n' R covers such as Rose Tattoo's "Nice Boys." Stripped of their excess layers of guitars and strings.



the tracks from the much-maligned Democracy work surprisingly well -especially "Better" and "I.R.S.," even if Axl's latest band sounds like a very competent G n' R covers act. At the end of the night, Axl addressed the crowd: "This is pretty much the worst fucking year of my life," he said, going on to ramble about "business bullshit" and the greedy vultures that surround him. Now there's the Axl we know and love.

ANDY GREENE

#### BUY THESE NOW

#### Vampire Weekend

Contra XL

Arty, preppy New York Afropoppers return with a killer second record. Highlights: the Manhattan jive of "White Sky" and the rock-steadyish "Diplomat's Son."

#### Surfer Blood

Astro Coast Kanine

Florida newcomers raised on a diet of Weezer, Pixies and Pavement launch into awesome monster-riff geek jams with a stadium-echo kick that Nineties indie kids were too grumpy to try.

#### Mary J. Blige

Stronger With Each Tear

Matriarch/Geffen

The owner of the most distinctive lungs in the business experiments with Auto-Tune and other modern-R&B tweaks - but shows she can still bring it all back home on the soulful "Kitchen."

#### Jerry Garcia Band \*\*\*\*

Let It Rock Rhino

Chilled-out '75 gig with Stones keyboardist Nicky Hopkins



TIED DOWN with studio projects while the Dead were on hiatus, Jerry Gar-

cia barely played out in 1975. So you can feel the back-inthe-saddle "ahhhhhh" throughout this cover-heavy collection, recorded over two nights on his Bay Area turf with his new Garcia Band. The pace veers between back-float and stoned pimp-strut; the jazzy runs on the Chuck Berry title track don't rock but sure do roll. Garcia is casually magnificent, but bandmate Nicky Hopkins makes this some of Garcia's most magical solo work; his flowing boogie-woogie piano arpeggios never sound like overplaying - just easygoing, absolute virtuosity. WILL HERMES

**Key Tracks:** "Sitting in Limbo," "Let's Spend the Night Together"

#### Animal REISSUE Collective \*\*\*

Campfire Songs Paw Tracks
Reissue of 2003 freak-folk
jam sparks up, passes it round



ANIMAL COLlective had a psychedelic-pop breakthrough in 2009 with Mer-

riweather Post Pavilion, so it's interesting to hear their old stuff with enlightened ears. The five tracks on this 42-minute LP were conceived not as bonfire singalongs but as music that might mystically emanate from the crackling blaze itself. It works: The ambient bursts of acoustic-guitar sparks and echoev voices recorded partly outdoors with birds, bugs and breeze joining in - conjure images of fire elves noodle-dancing amid the flames, tripping balls. As background music, it's a sweet, spaced-out moodsetter.

Key Tracks: "Queen in My Pictures," "De Soto De Son"

#### **Beach House**

\*\*\*1/2

Teen Dream Sub Pop
Baltimore duo create serious
drama out of echo and swirls



THE TITLE'S AT least half-right. Buoyed by reverbswathed guitars and the dusky

torch singing of Victoria Legrand, Baltimore's Beach House have been the dreampop duo to beat since 2006. They're more radiant than ever on their third disc, particularly on songs like "Zebra," with background chorales swooping over stately guitar plucking. The band is enraptured by the grandeur of Phil Spector and Brill Building teen pop, but there's no puppy love in the romantic fatalism on these songs ("You would slip from my mind," sings Legrand, "in a matter of time"). Beach House's dreams, and nightmares, are for adults. JODY ROSEN

Key Tracks: "Zebra," "Lover of Mine," "10 Mile Stereo"





#### **Hurricane Chris**

\* \*1/2

Unleashed Polo Grounds/J Baby-faced novelty rapper blossoms into full horndog



HURRICANE Chris, the babyfaced Louisiana rapper behind the 2007 novelty hit

"A Bay Bay," is now fully 20 years old, and his second studio album is wall-to-wall hedonism: boasts about club conquests and squeaking bedsprings delivered in couplets like "Girl, I know you heard about how I be switching the position....Work it, work it, stick it, stick it." Chris has a syrupy drawl that luxuriates in long vowel sounds, and he brings goofy horndog charm to the hit "Halle Berry (She's Fine)." But most of the time he sounds like a pipsqueak trying to play grown-up - a Lothario whose pickup lines land, time after time, with a thud.

Key Track: "Halle Berry (She's Fine)"

#### **MUSIC TECH**

#### Portable Tunes Version 3.0

#### XM SkyDock

\*\*\*

xmradio.com/skydock

WHAT IT IS An attachment that plugs into your car lighter and turns your iPhone or iPod Touch into an XM satellite radio.

WHAT WORKS It's a simple-to-set-up, relatively inexpensive (\$85 on Amazon) way to hook up your beater with satellite radio. They did a nice job using Apple's multitouch technology: Changing stations and seeing what else is playing is an easy flick of your finger. It's also a handsome iPhone charger.

WHAT DOESN'T Stay clear if your car stereo doesn't have an audio-in jack or a cassette deck to plug an adaptor into - otherwise, you'll be stuck listening through the SkyDock's weak FM transmitter. NATHAN BRACKETT



soundmatters.com

WHAT IT IS A pocket-size speaker (\$199 with Bluetooth, \$169 without) for iPods.

WHAT WORKS The foxL has astonishing sound for its size: The amount of bass and its complex range make the speaker's 2.2" by 5.6" by 1.4" dimensions seem like an optical illusion.

WHAT DOESN'T Of course, you're grading on a curve here: At its loudest settings, the bass gets boomy and overwhelms the mix, and tracks with noisy arrangements can come across as fuzzy. Also, you can't adjust the volume of your iPhone in Bluetooth mode. JOHN DIOSO



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#### DVDS





#### It Might Get Loud \*\*\*1/2

Sony Pictures Classics

"I plan to trick these guys into showing me all their tricks," says Jack White at the beginning of Loud. This elegant, somewhat reverent film about Jimmy Page, the Edge and White by Davis Guggenheim (An Inconvenient Truth) doesn't deliver

that level of goods, but it's intimate and hypnotizing: Page is dignified; the Edge is affable; White is alternately cocky and earnest. The jam session doesn't get much beyond a lukewarm rendition of "The Weight" as the credits roll, but stick around for the bonus outtakes and you get a treat: White teaching "Seven Nation Army" to the others, and Page returning the favor with "Kashmir." BARRY WALTERS



#### Michael Jackson's This Is It \*\*\*1/2

Sony Pictures

This rehearsal footage for Jackson's planned 50-date London extravaganza proves that he had held on to his extraordinary singing and dancing skills right up to the end: He's unguarded, assertive, far from childlike - and much easier to love

than the Jackson we saw for two decades. The main new thing on this DVD: bonus clips of Jackson auditioning dancers and preparing for rehearsals.



#### AC/DC: No Bull (The Director's Cut)

\*\*

Columbia

Proof that it's actually possible to mess up great rock & roll with bad editing. Veteran music-video director David Mallet cuts between cameras so often and so illogically that

this rereleased 1996 Madrid concert film is frustratingly frantic and disjointed even by today's impatient standards. The remastered sound mix brings out the balls in the band's performance of its greatest scream-along hits, but any sense of visual suspense is frittered away.

#### Various REISSUE Artists \*\*\*\*

Good God! Born Again Funk Numero Group

Seventies and Eighties gospel, on the good foot



AS AL GREEN could tell you, the line between pulpitrocking and

pelvis-rocking can be mighty thin. The second volume of Numero Group's Good God! series takes this point to the bridge and bevond. There's nothing as bizarre as the Voices of Conquest's choir-anddrum-kit jam "O Yes My Lord" (see 2006's A Gospel Funk Hymnal), but Born Again rivals its forerunner for fire-and-brimstone grooves. The ladies shine brightest: Lucy "Sister Soul" Rodgers rides a funky clavinet jam, and Ada Richards praises holy intoxication on the set's hardest cut, "I'm Drunk & Real High (In the Spirit of God)." Belly up to the bar. WILL HERMES

Key Tracks: "I'm Drunk & Real High," "Peter & John"

#### Eels \*\*\*

**End Times** Vagrant

Pretty songs can't hide pain of this breakup disc



EELS MASTERmind Mark Everett split with his wife in 2005, but

he's just gotten around to releasing his divorce album. He's a horribly strung-out love junkie on End Times, pining for his ex, talking to the bird on his porch and thinking the crazy homeless prophet on the corner is starting to make sense. Everett keeps these ballads and rockers short, spare and pretty; his sad reportage is straightforward to the point of being guileless. "I need a mother/It's really nothing new," he sings; familiar ground, perhaps, but still affecting. CHRISTIAN HOARD

Key Tracks: "In My Younger Days," "Little Bird"

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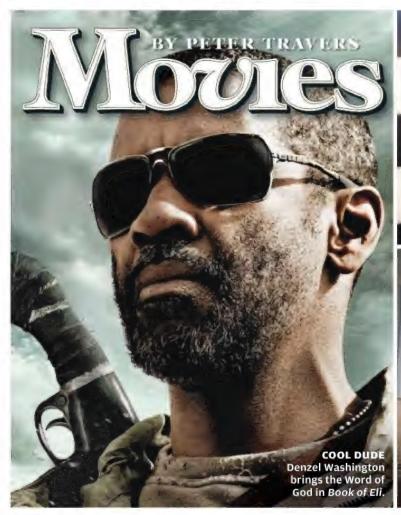






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## Surviving January

#### A guide to finding compensations in a month when Hollywood unloads its unholy spawn

#### The Book of Eli

\*\*1/2

Denzel Washington Directed by the Hughes Brothers

IF DENZEL WASHINGTON, Gary Oldman and the return of the Hughes brothers (it's been damn near a decade since From Hell) isn't enough to jazz you about The Book of Eli, you're probably not much of a film freak. OK, the movie is an apocalyptic tale with a religioso bent that does it no favors. We've been down this road to doom before, most recently in The Road. And Gary Whitta's script chokes on the dust of what came before.

Luckily, Allen Hughes and his directing twin, Albert, have skills. They can energize the familiar. Washington's Eli is a menace to a society that for-

got about God when the "flash" (read: nuclear winter) reduced the world to rubble 30 years ago. Eli keeps heading West with his holy message. And Lord help the rapists, thieves and murderers who get in the way of his gun-slinging, machete-slicing self. Eli can slash and burn like Neo in The Matrix. Even boss man Carnegie (Oldman, making a tasty treat of villainy) rears up when cowboy Eli ambles into his trashy town. Carnegie wants the King James Bible he thinks Eli is carrying. Eli won't give shit to this creep who beats up his blind mistress (Jennifer Beals) and threatens her hottie daughter (a vibrant Mila Kunis).

What happens next? See the movie or wait for Netflix. But look out for the killer scene with a geezer (Michael Gambon) and his wife (the great Fran-

ces de la Tour) who preserve the vestiges of civilization (music, china, silverware) and share creepy secrets. *The Book of Eli* isn't as exciting or funny or inspiring as it wants and needs to be, and its preachy ending is an ordeal. But Washington, a movie star who can act, is one cool dude who is worth following anywhere.

#### Saint John of Las Vegas ★¹/2

Steve Buscemi, Sarah Silverman

#### Directed by Hue Rhodes

JUST LOOKING AT HANGDOG Steve Buscemi and perky Sarah Silverman as mismatched lovers is a kick. What a comedy team these two virtuosos of the comically perverse could have made if they weren't stuck in the shambles that is *Saint*  John of Las Vegas. First-time director and screenwriter Hue Rhodes shows no discernible talent for dialogue, humor and, especially, pacing. For a movie than runs a mere 85 minutes, Saint John moves like a life sentence in molasses prison.

Buscemi plays John Alighieri (same last name as Dante's), a gambling junkie trying to take the cure by taking a nowhere job in an insurance company in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Just as he's settling into an eccentric romance with the cutie (Silverman) in the next cubicle, John is sent on the road by his boss (Peter Dinklage) to investigate an alleged fraud involving a totaled car and a stripper (Emmanuelle Chriqui) in a neck brace and a wheelchair. That would be fine if his destination wasn't Vegas - Kryptonite for a reformed gamer -

and if his partner wasn't Virgil (Romany Malco), a claims adjuster determined to take John through nine circles of hell that Dante himself would blanch at. Still, watching Buscemi at a cowboy nudist camp, a carnival shooting gallery or just getting gaga over Silverman almost makes it bearable.

## Creation \*\* Paul Bettany, Jennifer Connelly Directed by Jon Amiel

THIS ONE MEANS WELL, A kiss-of-death review if there ever was one. Paul Bettany takes an earnest shot at playing Charles Darwin, a 19thcentury man obsessed with monkeys, the origin of the species, the death of his favorite daughter and the disapproval of his religious wife (Jennifer Connelly). In other words, director Jon Amiel has reduced a crucial moment in science to a Lifetime weepie about a workaholic who needs personal tragedy to wake him up to his wife's virtues. The fact that Bettany and Connelly are married in real life adds surprisingly little zest. What provocation there is comes in the still-timely debate between science and faith that sneaks in from the sidelines when the tear-jerking momentarily abates.

#### 44 Inch Chest \*

Ray Winstone, Ian McShane Directed by Malcolm Venville

IT SOUNDED GOOD: A BUNCH of foulmouthed geezers taking bloody revenge on the French lover boy (Melvil Poupaud) who stole the wife (Joanne Whallev) of their car-salesman mate (Ray Winstone). With the acting power of Ian McShane, Stephen Dillane, Tom Wilkinson and John Hurt joining Winstone in a swearing challenge that could make David Mamet blush, 44 Inch Chest had the makings of the next Sexy Beast, since it shares the same screenwriters, Louis Mellis and David Scinto. But unlike Beast director Jonathan Glazer, Malcolm Venville coaches his ace acting team to ring infinite variations on the word "cunt" without realizing that there's a difference between exposing misogyny and crassly exploiting it.



#### 'Avatar': A Closer Look at a Megahit

It's the box-office champ of the new century, but the 'Avatar' backlash makes it worth a second look

What does a second viewing of Avatar get you, now that it's gone from a disaster-inthe-making to the biggest hit in, maybe, forever?

Perspective, for starters. I saw Avatar in a last-minute rush to deadline. Loved the 3-D eye candy of it, cringed at some clumsy dialogue, but came out in awe of James Cameron's creation of Pandora, a planet where 10-foot-tall blue natives live in harmony with nature. But after Avatar opened and amassed its first box-office billion, viewers started to take potshots. Among them:

It's Racist: The depiction of the blue-skinned Na'vi in dreadlocks and loincloths is gross stereotyping against blacks and Native Americans.

It's Anti-Christian: Cameron preaches the gospel of pantheism, with nature taking God's place. Even the Vatican frowned.

It's Anti-American: U.S. corporations want to despoil Pandora for a precious ore that will slake their greed.

It's Anti-Military: Our armed forces are ready to do the dirty work of corporate America by using war and genocide to get their way.

It's Pro-Smoking: Since the film's scientist, played by Sigourney Weaver, inhales, Cameron has been accused of promoting a filthy habit. Not so, the director insists: "We were showing that she

doesn't care about her human body, only her avatar body, which again is a negative comment about people in our real world."

It's a Rip-off: Mash-ups have been created online to show that crippled Marine Jake Sully (Sam Worthington) and his blue lady, Neytiri (Zoe Saldana), are just a new spin on the legend of John Smith and Pocahontas.

The defenders of Avatar will argue that the film is not liberal revenge porn but the salvation of an endangered species: moviegoers. The Internet, Netflix and whatever else keeps us at home and not buying movie tickets are the biggest threats to Hollywood since the devil created television in the 1950s. Cameron, with his 3-D magic, has found a way to get us off our asses and back into movie seats.

Is that a reason to see Avatar? No. That's just business. What struck me most after revisiting Cameron's fantasy was the solid structure of its storytelling and the lack of cynicism in its telling. That the film sets a new gold standard for popular filmmaking should be enough to win Cameron the Best Picture Oscar, even if it means defeating his ex-wife, Hurt Locker director Kathryn Bigelow. Forget the half-star I cut from my original rating. Avatar is a wonder to behold.

It gets \*\*\*

#### Crazy on the Outside zero stars

Tim Allen

Directed by Tim Allen

IT MIGHT SEEM UNJUST TO tar Tim Allen's mirthless farce about an ex-con (Allen) looking for a second chance as the worst movie of the worst-movie month. With Leap Year, The Spy Next Door, Tooth Fairy and When in Rome in the mix, the competition is stiff. But Allen screws up his directing debut with a script that smothers his wit in a blanket of bland.

#### Fish Tank \*\*\*\*\\\ Katie Jarvis Directed by Andrea Arnold

YOU DON'T EXPECT TO FIND movie gold in the January cesspool. That's what makes Fish Tank an exhilarating gift. Katie Jarvis, 18, hits you like a shot in the heart with her sensational breakout performance. And cheers to director Andrea Arnold, who flies on her own unerring instincts. On the surface, the film is pat melodrama, as 15-year-old Mia (Jarvis) acts out hostilities about being raised in the London projects by a single mom (Kierston Wareing) too driven by her own libido to worry about Mia.

That's when pat turns to pow. Get up in Mia's face, and she'll clock you. Hip-hop dancing is Mia's only goal until her mom's new stud, Connor (Michael Fassbender), develops an unhealthy interest. The electrifying Fassbender, so good in Hunger and Inglourious Basterds, nails every nuance in a complex role. His scenes with Jarvis have a hypnotic sexual energy. And while you're remembering new high-impact names, add Arnold. In only her second film, after 2006's Red Road, she keeps the screen filled to bursting with the beauty and raw terror of life.

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#### **JOHN MAYER**

[Cont. from 45] where I see myself for the rest of my life, this is not my ideal destiny,' and then I see myself fucking Dimples? What does that say for my case?"

Then again, there is what he did last summer. At a hotel in Vegas, he saw some girls by the pool, one thing led to another, and they all wound up in bed together. "And you know what? It wasn't smarmy. It was awesome. And then, after that, when I went out that night, I had the greatest time ever, because I was depleted, had no libido left, didn't have to do any of those crazy Blue Steel looks. It was unbelievable."

A waiter shows up. Mayer orders chicken. But then he realizes he ate chicken yesterday. "Fuck the chicken," he says and calls out for spaghetti Bolognese.

"I'll be honest with you," he says then. "All this weird shit about me? All this strangeness? I wouldn't have a music career without it. But I am at odds with myself. I have some presence of psychological damage from the past 36 months. I have not had a woman appear in my dreams sexually without a paparazzi in the dream too. I can't even have a wet dream without having to explain to someone who's grinding on me, 'We can't do this right now, because there's a guy over there taking pictures." He groans. "I don't know how much further I can do this before I'm a dead body on the side of the road. I mean, either I'm a total fucking nut case who can explain himself, or I'm really not crazy and I can explain myself. I don't know yet. But I'll be happy when I close out this life-partner thing. It's been a long time since I've felt attached. Think of how much mental capacity I'm using to meet the right person so I can stop giving a fuck about it."

He's on a real roll right now, caught up again in the workings of his own mind. At times like these, it's impossible to get a word in edgewise. It seems dangerous to even try. It's best just to let him go on, reserve judgment, realize that, above all else, he means well and is simply, in the end, only trying to find his way, as best he can.

"I don't care about anything other than energy," he goes on. "That's why people think, 'Is he bi? Is he that?' I've never slept with a man. But I get it. I've seen pictures of men on the Internet that are sexier than pictures of most women."

Has he ever felt it stir?

"Sure. Abso-fucking-lutely. You know when I didn't feel it stir? When I actually stood next to a real dude. When I walk in the locker room at the gym, I'm 100 percent straight as an arrow. But, look, because of all the porn I've watched, I'm now enamored with what I call 'the third kind.' It's not male, it's not female. It's a new creation by way of the hundreds of blow-job films I've seen. There's a new brand of dicks going around right now. It's a new dick. It's a superdick. This superdick is straight and one color, and it seeks to destroy the race of men before them.

"I have a hugely creative and visual relationship with things," he continues. "So what's my job going to be? Finding some-body to be the only person. Basically, what am I going to do with my imaginary headless, hung dudes without a hair on them or anything masculine about them? What am I going to do with those dicks when it comes time to find somebody? Do they go away? Do you find a woman who incorporates it? Do you love this woman so much you no longer need it? I'm like in *Avatar*. I'm a legless, dickless dude laying in a chamber, projecting myself in all ways. I'm this legless asshole—"

A few cute girls walk by. Mayer finally stops talking. He looks at them but that's all. "If I talk to them, I'm expressing an interest I'd be betraying if I saw someone else that I wanted to talk to more. It's too early in the evening, and they'd be a sidecar. Anyway, here's how tonight's going to go. After this, I'm going to go home, smoke weed, and play Modern Warfare 2. It's what I'm going to do all night." But then he tilts his nose into the air, says he's good with scents and would bet money that one of the girls is wearing a perfume called Child. "If you're wrong, you're an idiot. If you're right, you're like James Bond."

He turns to them. "Excuse me, can I be rude and ask you a question? Is somebody here wearing Child?"

Silence.

Then, a blonde: "I am," she says. "Well done."

So, tonight he's like James Bond. Tomorrow, who knows?

#### VAMPIRE WEEKEND

[Cont. from 51] the flute at age seven, and later mastered the piano, violin, guitar, banjo and Persian tar. "Anything you put in front of me, I can make some kind of sound out of," he says. His tastes are omnivorous: One minute he'll be gushing about Tchaikovsky's "1812 Overture," the next he'll declare Sublime's 40oz. to Freedom "fucking awesome." A tireless polymath, he has a hand in nearly every aspect of the band, from producing to designing the artwork.

Batmanglij is also gay, a fact he's never really discussed publicly. His friends have known since college, but he didn't come out to his parents until about two years ago. (Asked how they handled the news, he laughs: "My dad went to British boarding school. You don't get much gayer than that.") A self-described homebody, he was in a pretty serious relationship last winter, but they split up a few weeks into the recording of the album. "I tried everything to get him back," Batmanglij says. "He broke my heart."

To cope, Batmanglij threw himself into his work, clocking 15-hour days at Vampire Weekend's new studio. Their first album was recorded piecemeal, in Columbia music rooms and Tomson's parents' barn in Imlaystown, New Jersey. But for Contra, they went pro – setting up shop at Treefort Studios, a renovated storage space in industrial Brooklyn, and logging time at Manhattan's Avatar, where Bruce Springsteen recorded Born in the U.S.A. Where their debut often sounded like four guys jamming in a room while one of them pressed RECORD, Contra sparkles with studio wizardry: shimmery synths, gee-whiz samplers, even some Auto-Tune. "Our first record kind of has one vibe, one tone," says Baio. The new one, Batmanglij says, "goes in a thousand places at once."

Familiar themes prevail - rich girls, exotic locales. (Koenig wanted to call it either Paper Chase or Young Money.) The cover photo teases the band's yuppie reputation: a Reagan-era Polaroid of a blonde in a yellow Polo. But there's also a newfound compassion. Take "Diplomat's Son," which is inspired by that boarding-school story Koenig wrote. The original is an angry parable of class tension and resentment that culminates in a bloody beatdown on a soccer field. Batmanglij took it and made it a love story. "After you leave college, the world opens up," Koenig says. "For this record, I wanted there to be songs that everybody could understand."

Contra's title has been interpreted as a reference to everything from Nicaraguan counter-revolutionaries to the Eighties arcade game. One night at a bar, Koenig elaborates: "Basically, a contra is anybody you try to frame as your opposite – as not a part of your world. It's setting up a dichotomy. You can talk about people in very nuanced, compassionate ways – or you can be like, 'I'm liberal; that person is not. I'm for real; that person is a sellout.'"

Vampire Weekend being Vampire Weekend, the conversation soon moves to Hegel-contra-Marx and the Hegelian dialectic – the philosophical formulation that begins with a thesis, is challenged, and ultimately resolves into a conciliatory third way. "We talked about those ideas a little," Koenig says. "Not that we were having, like, a philosophical book club. In the dialectic, 'contra' is most similar to the word 'antithesis.' It's the opposite of what came before. But the idea of synthesis is, things that seem like opposites are actually deeply related." Everything is mixed up. Polar opposites don't exist.

"So *Contra* implies conflict," Koenig says. "But ultimately, I'd like to think the album is more about . . ."

Smiling, Batmanglij finishes his thought. "Resolution," he says.

#### **OMAR BIN LADEN**

[Cont. from 57] ligious things. I heard this 100 times. I was fed up." Like a bored teenage version of Martin Luther, Omar decided to stage a protest by tacking a note to the front of the mosque - being careful to disguise his identity by altering his handwriting. "Believers should not be put in a position of total boredom," he wrote, "as such will discourage believers from attending many worthwhile events at the mosque." But the note failed to spark a revolt. "After the people look at it, some smile," he recalls now. "But most say nothing. One guy said that nobody could do this but me. He came to me and said I did it. I said I didn't know."

T NIGHT, LISTENING TO THE airplanes that flew overhead, Omar began to dream of escape. All but three of his 10 brothers had joined his father in Afghanistan, but their companionship did little to relieve the tedium. "We were bored so much," he says. "We had nothing to do. Me and my brothers went out hunting on our horses. We traveled from village to village. We all planned to leave and see the world together."

But the day of reckoning with his father's violent vision was inevitable. To become the leader of Al Qaeda, Omar would have to prove himself as a warrior. Sometime around 1999, after Omar turned 17, Osama arranged for him to go to the front lines for 40 days and 40 nights. "He was giving me a test," Omar says. "There is a *hadith* – these are the sayings of the Prophet – that says if you live with the people for 40 days, you will be one of them. All my life I was fighting this battle inside me. It was a struggle. I wanted to see the real war. This was my chance."

Under the protection of his father's fighters. Omar was taken to the mountains north of Kabul, where Ahmad Shah Massoud was waging a civil war against the Taliban. A brilliant general known as the "Lion of Panjshir," Massoud had been instrumental in defeating the Soviets in the 1980s. At one point, playing with a walkie-talkie, Omar suddenly found himself talking to Massoud's men. The soldiers were friendly, but pointed. "You are Arab, and you should go away," they told him. "This is a war between tribes - nothing to do with religion." When Omar asked what they thought about Osama bin Laden, the Afghans said they respected him but felt he was being used by the Taliban.

What Omar saw at the front lines turned him against the war his father supported. "Muslims fighting Muslims? It was crazy," he recalls. "The fight with the Russians was over. I felt sorry for the victims. Innocent civilian farmers were attacked by soldiers. Women and children die for no reason. In the hospital I found a very bad situation. People broken, in-

jured. There was bad medical service. That was the start of wanting to leave all this. It changed me. I believe we could sort out our problems without fighting."

After 35 days, Omar left the front lines and returned to his father's base. "I finish what I needed to see," he says. "I couldn't stay more. I couldn't stand it. I hated it."

The rift between Omar and his father widened soon after, when Osama tried to recruit him to become a suicide bomber. Not directly – Osama was too devious for that. Bin Laden's hold over his followers came in large part from the way he never gave orders. He asked questions, made suggestions. "He never pushes anyone to do something," Omar says. "Never, ever. He asks you to do something. But if you don't want to, you don't have to. He only gives order in the very immediate war situation. Even then he is kind. He says, 'Please.'"

One day, around the time that bin Laden was plotting the attacks of 9/11, he tacked a piece of paper to the wall of the mosque to recruit men willing to be suicide bombers. A stir of excitement traveled through the camp as men signed up – likely some of the very men who perpetrated the attacks of September 2001. That same day, bin

"You never said anything to your father?"

"A lot of times I said things like that to my father. But not at this moment. He walked away from us. He was smiling, like it was just between him and his God." In Omar's world, it appears, it is possible to be misquoted in your own autobiography.

Beirut winds through the Anti-Lebanon Mountains. The car I have booked is a BMW 7 Series sedan, with tinted windows for Omar's security. Unimpressed, Omar sniffs at the fake-leather interior. Saudis, he says, drive only the finest Mercedes. He asks the driver to put on country & western music or Madonna – music he first heard as a boy in the mountains of Afghanistan, scanning the transistor radio for sounds of the outside world.

During the drive, as Omar reflects on his childhood and discusses his views on world issues, Zaina repeatedly interrupts to answer on his behalf. When I finally ask if she would mind if Omar spoke for himself, she retreats into glum silence.

I ask Omar what he thinks of Barack Obama. He says the president seems like

#### "I would tell Obama that you can't solve Afghanistan with more soldiers," Omar says. "It's like adding water to sand – it only makes the sand heavier and messier."

Laden called his sons together and said they should consider joining the other volunteers. "If any of you, my children, want to go, he should write his name down," their father told them. It was a sly rhetorical turn of phrase, tantamount to inciting his sons to self-annihilation.

I remind Omar that the way he tells the story in his memoir, this was the moment when he finally confronted his father. "How can you ask this?" he recounts himself demanding. It is presented as a heroic gesture: Omar protecting his brothers and speaking out forcefully against his father's death cult.

Omar appears confused. "It says that in the book?"

Yes, I say – it's right there on page 263. Zaina reaches for my copy to search for the passage. When she reads the lines aloud, however, Omar shakes his head. "It was not like that," he insists. "It is true my father put the paper up in the mosque and everyone wanted to put their name on it. He didn't say I should go. He said if anyone wants to go they can put their name on the paper in the mosque. I wasn't going to put my name. But one of my little brothers wanted to put his name. I shouted at him not to do it. My older brother and I are the leaders, so no one dared to do it."

a very refined man - intelligent, widely read, capable. But he is certain Obama is on the verge of committing a massive error by sending more troops into Afghanistan. "Obama should ask for my advice about Afghanistan," he says. "I could help. But I have to see him personally. I would tell him you can't solve Afghanistan's problems with more soldiers. It is like adding water to sand, as we say in the Arab world it only makes the sand heavier and messier. If I was in his position, the first thing I would do is make a truce. Then for six months or one year, no fighting, no soldiers. Afghanistan can never be won. It has nothing to do with my father. It is the Afghan people."

It is dark by the time we take the switch-back roads down into Beirut. This is the fabled Arab city that Omar has heard about all his life, the pearl of the Mediterranean, the Paris of the Levant, Sin City for Arab men seeking to escape the stifling hypocrisy of their own nations. In Omar's imagination, Beirut is the epitome of class and sophistication. His uncle, he says, owns the Hard Rock Cafe on the Corniche, near our hotel.

As a good Muslim, Omar is a teetotaler, but that doesn't mean he isn't interested in seeing what the city has to offer. That

#### **OMAR BIN LADEN**

night, after dinner, we catch a cab to the Music Hall, a cabaret-style club in a converted movie theater in the center of Beirut. In the packed main room, a singer dressed as a Saudi sheik is belting an Arabic tune. The air ripples with what has long made Beirut legendary: astonishingly beautiful people, cultural diversity, the wild abandon of a perpetual war zone. It is Omar's first time in a real club, not the dreary sex trade of a Syrian strip bar. He stands with his back to the wall, looking on in amazement as a crowd of people his own age drink and dance and flirt with each other. On this night, in the noise and sweat and joy, the Music Hall may well be the best club on the planet.

"You like?" I ask Omar.

"Yes," he says, straight-faced. "But I want rock & roll. Rock & roll is the best."

As if on cue, a Twisted Sister tribute band appears onstage. The players are dressed in full heavy-metal glam regalia: big wigs, flashy makeup, tight-fitting spandex, platform heels. The crowd goes berserk as the band lights into a bonecrushingly loud cover of "We're Not Gonna Take It."

"This is the best!" Omar says with a huge grin, all his teeth on display.

By the next morning, however, Omar has had a change of heart. When we meet for a late breakfast, he says he didn't enjoy the Music Hall at all. "That was an Iraqi dressed as a high sheik, like a prince or a bin Laden," Omar says. "It was not respectful. A Saudi doesn't dance in front of silly young people in Lebanon. It is the other way around. I would ban this place if I was the ruler of Lebanon.

"I don't like modern people," he continues, his words growing emphatic. "I like original people. If you go back 1,000 years, you will find the same people. I am like that – the way I look. But there are some people who are very strange-looking. Not black or white or Chinese or Arab. I hate this. I get a mess in my head. I don't like the modern life. It is a mistake. I like pure-looking faces. I talked about this with my father. He is the same as me. He doesn't like the mix."

Omar looks directly at me. "Like you," he says. "You are not original. You are a mix." The offense in his words seems to elude him, as if he doesn't realize his ideas about racial superiority might have an effect on the person he is talking to.

For all his insights into his father's pathology, Omar can also come across as something of an apologist for the elder bin Laden. Though Westerners might think he is repudiating his father, he is careful to signal to Arabs that he is still a conventionally respectful son. He refers to his father as "kind" – by which he means that Osama, unlike other jihadists, follows a religious and moral code, however

perverse. He even downplays his father's attempt to recruit him as a suicide bomber. "He thinks he is doing it for justice, for the Muslim people," he says.

Such ambivalence has prompted some counterterrorism experts to question whether Omar is actually operating as a double agent, dispatched by his father to deploy peacenik rhetoric as a deceptive and sophisticated weapon. Michael Scheuer, the former head of the bin Laden desk at the CIA, has even written an article about Omar titled "Osama's Flower-Child Son or Al Qaeda Disinformation Agent?" When I contact Scheuer, he says he has just finished reading Omar's memoir, which he considers an important piece of intelligence. The book confirms much of what the CIA has long believed about bin Laden. But it seems to Scheuer that Omar is also pursuing an unspoken agenda, one that serves his father.

"When it is published in Arabic, it will

he had when he suggested his sons become suicide bombers.

Alone for the first time in his life, Omar took a car to the Pakistan border. A few months later, his father destroyed the World Trade Center, killing thousands. "I never thought the attack would be civilian buildings," Omar says. "I thought it would be a ship, like the USS Cole. My father's dream was to bring the Americans to Afghanistan. He would do the same thing he did to the Russians. I was surprised the Americans took the bait. I so much respected the mentality of President Clinton. He was the one who was smart. When my father attacked his places, he sent a few cruise missiles to my father's training camp. He didn't get my father, but after all the war in Afghanistan, they still don't have my father. They have spent hundreds of billions. Better for America to keep the money for its economy. In Clinton's time, America was very, very smart. Not like a

#### "When Bush was elected, my father was so happy," Omar says. "This is the kind of president he needs — one who will attack and spend money and break the country."

make his father look like a hero in the Muslim world," Scheuer observes. "People say Osama didn't really fight or give up the luxurious lifestyle. But Omar lays out the story in detail about what a tough hombre his father is and how he gave up everything for God. The book shows bin Laden to be eloquent, devout, pious, with extraordinary leadership qualities in the Muslim context. He's Robin Hood eating lousy food in the mountains with his men. That is a much more powerful enemy than a madman."

MAR MADE HIS FINAL BREAK with his father in April 2001, when one of the older fighters took him aside and warned him that "a big plan" was in the works. "You need to be far, far away," the fighter told him. "It is my belief that many of us will die." The elder bin Laden reluctantly agreed to let Omar go. "I don't agree with you leaving me," he told his son. "But I can't stop you."

"My father is a wealthy man," Omar recalls. "He gave me \$10,000 in cash. He told me to get a car and go." Omar's eyes well with tears. "If he wanted to keep me, he had to follow my way. If I wanted to keep him, I have to follow his way. I had a broken heart as I drove away. We don't show our feelings. I kissed his hand and said goodbye. This is the last time I saw him."

He remembers his last glimpse of his father: As Osama bin Laden walked away, he wore the same small, mysterious smile bull that runs after the red scarf.

"I was still in Afghanistan when Bush was elected," he continues. "My father was so happy. This is the kind of president he needs – one who will attack and spend money and break the country. Even Bush's own mother says he is the biggest idiot boy of his family. I am sure my father wanted McCain more than Obama. McCain has the same mentality as Bush. My father would be disappointed because Obama get the position."

"Do you think Obama can win in Afghanistan?"

"Out of what you see," Omar asks, "what do you think?"

According to Omar, Americans are actually lucky that his father has not been captured or killed. "It is going to be worse when my father dies," he says. "The world is going to be very, very nasty then. It will be a disaster."

"Omar always says that without the head, the arms and legs will run wherever," Zaina says.

"I know this for a fact," Omar says. "People were always asking my father to attack more. They would say, 'Sheik, we must do more.' Crazy fucking things. My father has a religious goal. He is controlled by the rules of jihad. He only kills if he thinks there is a need."

"Will there be more attacks?" I ask.

"I don't think so," Omar says. "He doesn't need to. As soon as America went to Afghanistan, his plan worked. He has already won."

N OUR LAST DAY IN Beirut, Omar appears agitated. He seems to be regretting the interview, the book, the whole idea of opening himself up to the scrutiny of people like me. But he is also impelled forward, trying to find a way to make his own fame and fortune. He asks me what I think his future might be. Could he be a successful businessman? Could he be an important person? Could he help make peace in the world? Would the United Nations want his help? Would Obama, or Hillary Clinton, want to meet with him?

Omar may have rejected his father's violence, but he shares the elder bin Laden's sense of being destined for greatness. Rather than citing the Koran to make sense of his circumstances, he relies on a somewhat different canon. "I am like the character of William Wallace in the movie Braveheart," he says. "Sometimes people say I look a lot like Mel Gibson. It is a strange accident. William Wallace wanted to live his normal life, but they push him and push him to become a warrior. The same for me. I have been pushed to be political. I have been given no good life, no good business. It is impossible for me to live a normal life. I tried hard for years. In Islam, what is happening to me is not allowed - the sins of the father going to the son. I am like Tom Cruise in the movie The Last Samurai. He turned around to fight his own people. This is like me."

Omar orders a *shisha* and a Turkish coffee. As he smokes the hookah-like pipe, he wonders aloud at what the future holds for him. His older brother Sa'ad is believed to have been killed by a drone missile in Pakistan last year, and six other siblings are reportedly being held against their will in Tehran by the

Iranian government. Returning to Jeddah and the life of a scrap-metal merchant holds no interest for him. "I need to make a hundred million dollars," he says. "I need to make a billion. Do you know how I can make money like this?" I allow that I do not.

Omar turns to the deepest question defining his existence: how to deal with his father's legacy. His father, he says, rejected money and power to go to the mountains of Afghanistan and fight for what he believed. In the same way, Omar adds, he himself has rejected jihad to return to the "real" world and live according to his beliefs.

As Omar sees things, his father had destroyed the Soviet empire. Now, nearly a decade after 9/11, his father's vision for an America of economic ruin and a soul-sapping war in Afghanistan has come to pass. As far as Omar is concerned, his father has brought ruin to two empires. What does the son of such a man do to compete with that?

"If I had stayed with my father, I would have the ambition to be a modern-day Alexander the Great," Omar says. "I have a larger ambition than my father. I find this life I have to be very small. I expected my life to be bigger than this. I feel this world to be small. It could be under one man. If I am in my father's way, I would want to be that man. If I was in that position, I would want to rule the world. I want to be the highest."

Omar puffs on his shisha.

"Always the son tries to be better than his father," he says. "I try my best to be better – in a good way. I think a lot of people should thank God I chose the peaceful way. If I chose war, I would be unbelievable at it. A lot of people should pray to their god to thank him that I did not do that."

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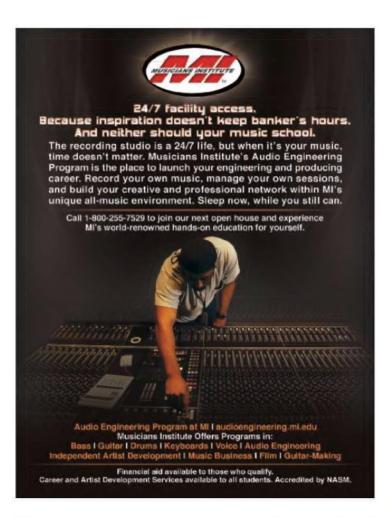
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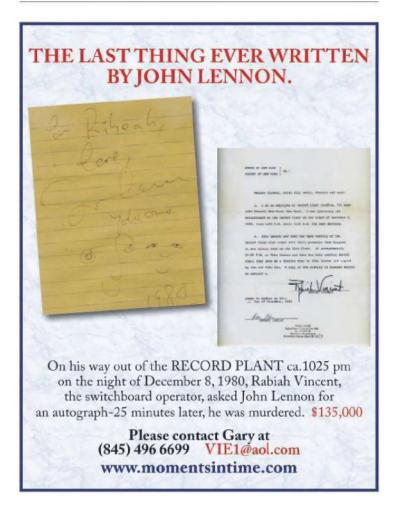
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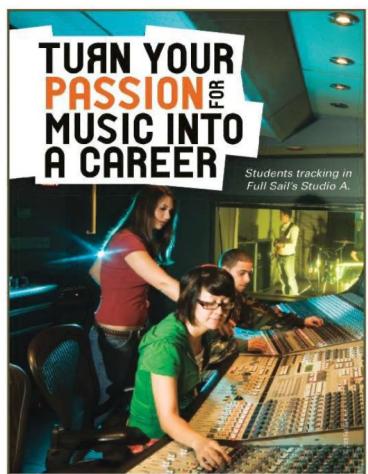
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2 Ke\$ha

'Blah Blah Blah" - Kemosabe/RCA

**Lady Gaga** 

"Bad Romance" - Streamline/ KonLive/Cherrytree/Interscope

'Replay" - Beluga Heights



"Empire State of Mind" -

**Owl City** 

"Fireflies" - Universal Republic

Lil Wayne

"Drop the World" - Cash Money

**Young Money** 

**Black Eyed Peas** 

10 David Guetta

Sexy Bitch" - Virgin

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#### SIRIUS XMU **TOP 10 SONGS**

**Animal Collective** 'What Would I Want? Sky"

The xx

"Heart Skipped a Beat" -Young Turks

Yeasayer

'Ambling Alp" - Secretly Canadian

Vampire Weekend

**Hot Chip** 

'One Life Stand" - Astralwerks

**Broken Bells** "The High Road" - Columbia

'Friendly Ghost" - Matadoi

**Sondre Lerche** "Bluish" - Astralwerks

The Cribs

'We Share the Same Skies" -



10 The Flaming Lips

'Breathe" - Warner Br

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#### From the Vault

RS 440, January 31st, 1985

#### TOP 10 SINGLES

Madonna

"Like a Virgin" - Sire

Foreigner

"I Want to Know What Love Is" -

Chicago

"You're the Inspiration" - Warner/ Full Moon

Philip Bailey With Phil Collins

Wham!

"Careless Whisper" - Columbia

**Jack Wagner** 

**Bryan Adams** 

'Run to You" - A&M

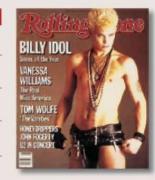
**Don Henley** 'Boys of Summer" - Geffen

**Billy Ocean** 

"Loverboy" - Jive

10 Prince and the Revolution

I Would Die 4 U" - Warne



#### On the Cover

"ROLLING STONE sucks. If they were clever, they would have bought their own TV channel. I want to be on the back of ROLLING STONE. Don't put me on the front! I think it sucks being on the front of ROLLING STONE! If I am, I better be real. We don't want no Cyndi Lauper this year." -Billy Idol

#### **Top 40 Albums**

Ke\$ha Animal - Kemosabe/RCA

2 Susan Boyle I Dreamed a Dream - Syco/Columbia

Lady Gaga The Fame - Streamline/KonLive/Cherrytre Interscope 2

Alicia Keys The Element of Freedom - MBK// 4 3

Mary J. Blige Stronger With Each Tear - Matriarch/

Alvin and the Chipmunks: 6 The Squeakquel Soundtrack-Fox

Taylor Swift Fearless - Big Mac

8 8 **Black Eyed Peas** 

Justin Bieber

Lady Gaga The Fame Monster (EP) - Streamline/ KonLive/Cherrytree/Interscope 10 9

Rihanna 11 14

Rated R - SRP/Def Jam 12 15 Michael Bublé

Crazy Love - 143/Reprise

Young Money We Are Young Money - Cash Money/ Universal Motown 13

14 10 **Owl City** 

Glee: The Music Volume 2 15

**Eminem** 13 16

Relapse - Web/Shady/Aftermath/Interscope 17 20 **Lady Antebellum** 

Lady Antebellum - Capitol Nashville Carrie Underwood 18 17

John Mayer Battle Studies - Columbia 19 19

Glee: The Music Volume 1 20 18

**NOW 32** 21 16

Various Artists - EMI/Universal/Zomba 22 23 Jay-Z The Blueprint 3 - Roc Nation

23 22

Michael Jackson This Is It (Soundtrack) - MJJ/Epic Robin Thicke Sex Therapy: The Session - Star Trak/ Interscope 24 21

Zac Brown Band 25 25

The Foundation - Roar/Bigger Picture/ Home Grown/Atlantic Kings of Leon Only by the Night - RCA 26 24

27 NEW **Katharine McPhee** 

Jason Aldean 28 31

**Norah Jones** 29 30

30 28 Selena Gomez and the Scene

31 32

Soundtrack - Fox/Atlantic Beyoncé I Am...Sasha Fierce - Music World/ Columbia 32 41

33 46 Nickelback

The Twilight Saga: New Moon Soundtrack - Summit/Chop Shop/Atlantic

Michael Jackson 35 33

36 26

Soundtrack - Geffen

Trey Songz Ready - Songbook/Atlantic 37 43

Gucci Mane The State vs. Radric Davis Brick Squad/Asylum 38 35

39 44 Darius Rucker Learn to Live - Capitol Nashville

Adam Lambert 40 36 our Entertainment - 19/RCA



#### **Ke\$ha \$cores**

Thanks to monster hit "Tik ToK" and the rising "Blah Blah Blah," the electro-pop newcomer sold 151.942 LPs her first week - 76 percent of which were downloads.



#### Goo Goo for Gaga

Last year's breakout star is finishing up a tour and has two discs in the Top 10. If you add the sales of the records together, she'd be at Number Two.



#### Squeak-Tastic

The critics may have savaged the film, but the Chipmunks soundtrack (which features squeaky covers of Beyoncé and Katy Perry) is a smash.



#### Is Kat McFinished?

Three years ago, the American Idol runner-up sold 116,000 copies of her first LP in Week One. The follow-up debuted with 13 percent of that this week.

OO Chart position on Jan. 13th, 2010 OO Chart position on Jan. 6th, 2010 New Entry A Greatest Gainer 2ND Re-Entry

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